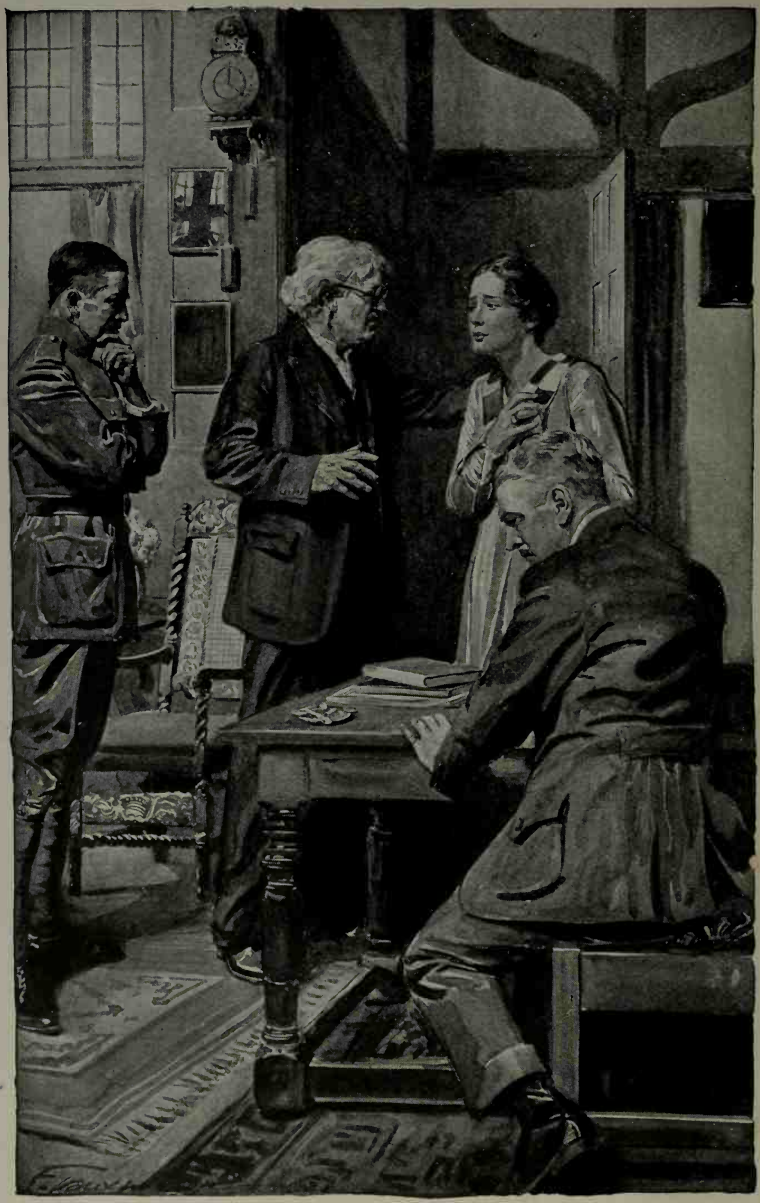
THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND



"The truth may just as well be told," she interrupted.
FRONTISPIECE. *See page 189.*

THE WORKS OF

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM



THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

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CHAPTER I

Lady Anselman stood in the centre of the lounge at the Ritz Hotel and with a delicately-poised forefinger counted her guests. There was the great French actress who had every charm but youth, chatting vivaciously with a tall, pale-faced man whose French seemed to be as perfect as his attitude was correct. The popular wife of a great actor was discussing her husband's latest play with a Cabinet Minister who had the air of a school-boy present at an illicit feast. A very beautiful young woman, tall and fair, with grey-blue eyes and a wealth of golden, almost yellow hair, was talking to a famous musician. A little further in the background, a young man in the uniform of a naval lieutenant was exchanging what seemed to be rather impressive chaff with a petite but exceedingly good-looking girl. Lady Anselman counted them twice, glanced at the clock and frowned.

"I can't remember whom we are waiting for!" she exclaimed a little helplessly to the remaining guest, a somewhat tired-looking publisher who stood by her side. "I am one short. I dare say it will

come to me in a minute. You know every one, I suppose, Mr. Daniell?"

The publisher shook his head.

"I have met Lord Romsey and also Madame Sélarne," he observed. "For the rest, I was just thinking what a stranger I felt."

"The man who talks French so well," Lady Anselman told him, dropping her voice a little, "is Surgeon-Major Thomson. He is inspector of hospitals at the front, or something of the sort. The tall, fair girl — isn't she pretty! — is Geraldine Conyers, daughter of Admiral Sir Seymour Conyers. That's her brother, the sailor over there, talking to Olive Moreton; their engagement was announced last week. Lady Patrick of course you know, and Signor Scobel, and Adelaide Cunningham — you do know her, don't you, Mr. Daniell? She is my dearest friend. How many do you make that?"

The publisher counted them carefully.

"Eleven including ourselves," he announced.

"And we should be twelve," Lady Anselman sighed. "Of course!" she added, her face suddenly brightening. "What an idiot I am! It's Ronnie we are waiting for. One can't be cross with him, poor fellow. He can only just get about."

The fair girl, who had overheard, leaned across. The shade of newly awakened interest in her face, and the curve of her lips as she spoke, added to her charm. A gleam of sunlight flashed upon the yellow-gold of her plainly coiled hair.

"Is it your nephew, Captain Ronald Granet, who is coming?" she asked a little eagerly.

Lady Anselman nodded.

"He only came home last Tuesday with dispatches from the front," she said. "This is his first day out."

"Ah! but he is wounded, perhaps?" Madame Sélarne inquired solicitously.

"In the left arm and the right leg," Lady Anselman assented. "I believe that he has seen some terrible fighting, and we are very proud of his D. S. O. The only trouble is that he is like all the others — he will tell us nothing."

"He shows excellent judgment," Lord Romsey observed.

Lady Anselman glanced at her august guest a little querulously.

"That is the principle you go on, nowadays, isn't it?" she remarked. "I am not sure that you are wise. When one is told nothing, one fears the worst, and when time after time the news of these small disasters reaches us piecemeal, about three weeks late, we never get rid of our forebodings, even when you tell us about victories. . . . Ah! Here he comes at last," she added, holding out both her hands to the young man who was making his somewhat difficult way towards them. "Ronnie, you are a few minutes late but we're not in the least cross with you. Do you know that you are looking better already? Come and tell me whom you don't know of my guests and I'll introduce you."

The young man, leaning upon his stick, greeted his aunt and murmured a word of apology. He was very fair, with a slight, reddish moustache and the

remains of freckles upon his face. His grey eyes were a little sunken, and there were lines about his mouth which one might have guessed had been brought out recently by pain or suffering of some sort. His left arm reclined uselessly in a black silk sling. He glanced around the little assembly.

"First of all," he said, bowing to the French actress and raising her fingers to his lips, "there is no one who does not know Madame Sélarne. Lady Patrick, we have met before, haven't we? I am going to see your husband in his new play the first night I am allowed out. Mr. Daniell I have met, and Lord Romsey may perhaps do me the honour of remembering me," he added, shaking hands with the Cabinet Minister.

He turned to face Geraldine Conyers, who had been watching him with interest. Lady Anselman at once introduced them.

"I know that you haven't met Miss Conyers because she has been asking about you. This is my nephew Ronnie, Geraldine. I hope that you will be friends."

The girl murmured something inaudible as she shook hands. The young soldier looked at her for a moment. His manner became almost serious.

"I hope so, too," he said quietly.

"Olive, come and make friends with my nephew if you can spare a moment from your young man," Lady Anselman continued. "Captain Granet — Miss Olive Moreton. And this is Geraldine's brother — Lieutenant Conyers."

The two men shook hands pleasantly. Lady An-

selman glanced at the clock and turned briskly towards the corridor.

"And now, I think," she announced, "luncheon."

As she moved forward, she was suddenly conscious of the man who had been talking to Madame Sélarne. He had drawn a little on one side and he was watching the young soldier with a curious intentness. She turned back to her nephew and touched him on the arm.

"Ronnie," she said, "I don't know whether you have met Surgeon-Major Thomson in France? Major Thomson, this is my nephew, Captain Granet."

Granet turned at once and offered his hand to the other man. Only Geraldine Conyers, who was a young woman given to noticing things, and who had also reasons of her own for being interested, observed the rather peculiar scrutiny with which each regarded the other. Something which might almost have been a challenge seemed to pass from one to the other.

"I may not have met you personally," Granet admitted, "but if you are the Surgeon-Major Thomson who has been doing such great things with the Field Hospitals at the front, then like nearly every poor crock out there I owe you a peculiar debt of gratitude. You are the man I mean, aren't you?" the young soldier concluded cordially.

Major Thomson bowed, and a moment later they all made their way along the corridor, across the restaurant, searched for their names on the cards and took their places at the table which had been

reserved for them. Lady Anselman glanced around with the scrutinising air of the professional hostess, to see that her guests were properly seated before she devoted herself to the Cabinet Minister. She had a word or two to say to nearly every one of them.

"I have put you next Miss Conyers, Ronnie," she remarked, "because we give all the good things to our men when they come home from the war. And I have put you next Olive, Ralph," she went on, turning to the sailor, "because I hear you are expecting to get your ship to-day or to-morrow, so you, too, have to be spoiled a little. As a general rule I don't approve of putting engaged people together, it concentrates conversation so. And, Lord Romsey," she added, turning to her neighbour, "please don't imagine for a moment that I am going to break my promise. We are going to talk about everything in the world except the war. I know quite well that if Ronnie has had any particularly thrilling experiences, he won't tell us about them, and I also know that your brain is packed full of secrets which nothing in the world would induce you to divulge. We are going to try and persuade Madame to tell us about her new play," she concluded, smiling at the French actress, "and there are so many of my friends on the French stage whom I must hear about."

Lord Romsey commenced his luncheon with an air of relief. He was a man of little more than middle-age, powerfully built, inclined to be sombre, with features of a legal type, heavily jawed.

"Always tactful, dear hostess," he murmured. "As a matter of fact, nothing but the circumstance that it was your invitation and that Madame Sélarne was to be present, brought me here to-day. It is so hard to avoid speaking of the great things, and for a man in my position," he added, dropping his voice a little, "so difficult to say anything worth listening to about them, without at any rate the semblance of indiscretion."

"We all appreciate that," Lady Anselman assured him sympathetically. "Madame Sélarne has promised to give us an outline of the new play which she is producing in Manchester."

"If that would interest you all," Madame Sélarne assented, "it commences — so!"

For a time they nearly all listened in absorbed silence. Her gestures, the tricks of her voice, the uplifting of her eyebrows and shoulders — all helped to give life and colour to the little sketch she expounded. Only those at the remote end of the table ventured upon an independent conversation. Mrs. Cunningham, the woman whom her hostess had referred to as being her particular friend, and one who shared her passion for entertaining, chatted fitfully to her neighbour, Major Thomson. It was not until luncheon was more than half-way through that she realised the one-sidedness of their conversation. She studied him for a moment curiously. There was something very still and expressionless in his face, even though the sunshine from the broad high windows which overlooked the Park, was shining full upon him.

"Tell me about yourself!" she insisted suddenly. "I have been talking rubbish quite long enough. You have been out, haven't you?"

He assented gravely.

"I went with the first division. At that time I was in charge of a field hospital."

"And now?"

"I am Chief Inspector of Field Hospitals," he replied.

"You are home on leave?"

"Not exactly," he told her, a shade of stiffness in his manner. "I have to come over very often on details connected with the administration of my work."

"I should have known quite well that you were a surgeon," she observed.

"You are a physiognomist, then?"

"More or less," she admitted. "You see, I love people. I love having people around me. My friends find me a perfect nuisance, for I am always wanting to give parties. You have the still, cold face of a surgeon — and the hands, too," she added, glancing at them.

"You are very observant," he remarked laconically.

"I am also curious," she laughed, "as you are about to discover. Tell me why you are so interested in Ronnie Granet? You hadn't met him before, had you?"

Almost for the first time he turned and looked directly at his neighbour. She was a woman whose fair hair was turning grey, well-dressed, sprightly,

agreeable. She had a humourous mouth and an understanding face.

"Captain Granet was a stranger to me," he assented. "One is naturally interested in soldiers, however."

"You must have met thousands like him," she remarked, — "good-looking, very British, keen sportsman, lots of pluck, just a little careless, hating to talk about himself and serious things. I have known him since he was a boy."

Major Thomson continued to be gravely interested.

"Granet!" he said to himself thoughtfully. "Do I know any of his people, I wonder?"

"You know some of his connections, of course," Mrs. Cunningham replied briskly. "Sir Alfred Anselman, for instance, is his uncle."

"His father and mother?"

"They are both dead. There is a large family place in Warwickshire, and a chateau, just now, I am afraid, in the hands of the Germans. It was somewhere quite close to the frontier. Lady Granet was an Alsatian. He was to have gone out with the polo team, you know, to America, but broke a rib just as they were making the selection. He played cricket for Middlesex once or twice, too, and he was Captain of Oxford the year that they did so well."

"An Admirable Crichton," Major Thomson murmured.

"In sport, at any rate," his neighbour assented. "He has always been one of the most popular young

men about town, but of course the women will spoil him now."

"Is it my fancy," he asked, "or was he not reported a prisoner?"

"He was missing twice, once for over a week," Mrs. Cunningham replied. "There are all sorts of stories as to how he got back to the lines. A perfect young dare-devil, I should think. I must talk to Mr. Daniell for a few minutes or he will never publish my reminiscences."

She leaned towards her neighbour on the other side and Major Thomson was able to resume the rôle of attentive observer, a rôle which seemed somehow his by destiny. He listened without apparent interest to the conversation between Geraldine Conyers and the young man whom they had been discussing.

"I think," Geraldine complained, "that you are rather overdoing your diplomatic reticence, Captain Granet. You haven't told me a single thing. Why, some of the Tommies I have been to see in the hospitals have been far more interesting than you."

He smiled.

"I can assure you," he protested, "it isn't my fault. You can't imagine how fed up one gets with things out there, and the newspapers can tell you ever so much more than we can. One soldier only sees a little bit of his own corner of the fight, you know."

"But can't you tell me some of your own personal experiences?" she persisted. "They are so much more interesting than what one reads in print."

"I never had any," he assured her. "Fearfully slow time we had for months."

"Of course, I don't believe a word you say," she declared, laughing.

"You're not taking me for a war correspondent, by any chance, are you?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Your language isn't sufficiently picturesque! Tell me, when are you going back?"

"As soon as I can pass the doctors — in a few days, I hope."

"You hope?" she repeated. "Do you really mean that, or do you say it because it is the proper thing to say?"

He appeared for the moment to somewhat resent her question.

"The fact that I hope to get back," he remarked coldly, "has nothing whatever to do with my liking my job when I get there. As a matter of fact, I hate it. At the same time, you can surely understand that there isn't any other place for a man of my age and profession."

"Of course not," she agreed softly. "I really am sorry that I bothered you. There is one thing I should like to know, though, and that is how you managed to escape?"

He shook his head but his amiability seemed to have wholly returned. His eyes twinkled as he looked at her.

"There we're up against a solid wall of impossibility," he replied. "You see, some of our other chaps may try the dodge. I gave them the tip and

I don't want to spoil their chances. By-the-bye, do you know the man two places down on your left? " he added, dropping his voice a little. " Looks almost like a waxwork figure, doesn't he? "

" You mean Major Thomson? Yes, I know him," she assented, after a moment's hesitation. " He is very quiet to-day, but he is really most interesting."

Their hostess rose and beamed on them all from her end of the table.

" We have decided," she announced, " to take our coffee out in the lounge."

CHAPTER II

The little party trooped out of the restaurant and made their way to a corner of the lounge, where tables had already been prepared with coffee and liqueurs. Geraldine Conyers and Captain Granet, who had lingered behind, found a table to themselves. Lady Anselman laid her fingers upon Major Thomson's arm.

"Please talk for a few more minutes to Sélarne," she begged. "Your French is such a relief to her."

He obeyed immediately, although his eyes strayed more than once towards the table at which Captain Granet and his companion were seated. Madame Sélarne was in a gossipy mood and they found many mutual acquaintances.

"To speak a foreign language as you do," she told him, "is wonderful. Is it in French alone, monsieur, that you excel, or are you, perhaps, a great linguist?"

"I can scarcely call myself that," he replied, "but I do speak several other languages. In my younger days I travelled a good deal."

"German, perhaps, too?" she inquired with a little grimace.

"I was at a hospital in Berlin," he confessed.

Lady Anselman's party was suddenly increased by

the advent of some acquaintances from an adjoining table, all of whom desired to be presented to Madame Sélarne. Major Thomson, set at liberty, made his way at once towards the small table at which Captain Granet and Geraldine Conyers were seated. She welcomed him with a smile.

"Are you coming to have coffee with us?" she asked.

"If I may," he answered. "I shall have to be off in a few minutes."

A waiter paused before their table and offered a salver on which were several cups of coffee and liqueur glasses. Captain Granet leaned forward in his place and stretched out his hand to serve his companion. Before he could take the cup, however, the whole tray had slipped from the waiter's fingers, caught the corner of the table, and fallen with its contents on to the carpet. The waiter himself — a small, undersized person with black, startled eyes set at that moment in a fixed and unnatural stare — made one desperate effort to save himself and then fell backwards. Every one turned around, attracted by the noise of the falling cups and the sharp, half-stifled groan which broke from the man's lips. Captain Granet sprang to his feet.

"Good heavens! The fellow's in a fit!" he exclaimed.

The maître d'hôtel and several waiters came hurrying up towards the prostrate figure, by the side of which Major Thomson was already kneeling. The manager, who appeared upon the scene as though by magic, and upon whose face was an ex-

pression of horror that his clients should have been so disturbed, quickly gave his orders. The man was picked up and carried away. Major Thomson followed behind. Two or three waiters in a few seconds succeeded in removing the debris of the accident, the orchestra commenced a favourite waltz. The maître d'hôtel apologised to the little groups of people for the commotion — they were perhaps to blame for having employed a young man so delicate — he was scarcely fit for service.

"He seemed to be a foreigner," Lady Anselman remarked, as the man addressed his explanations to her.

"He was a Belgian, madam. He was seriously wounded at the commencement of the war. We took him direct from the hospital."

"I hope the poor fellow will soon recover," Lady Anselman declared. "Please do not think anything more of the affair so far as we are concerned. You must let me know later on how he is."

The maître d'hôtel retreated with a little bow. Geraldine turned to Captain Granet.

"I think," she said, "that you must be very kind-hearted, for a soldier."

He turned and looked at her.

"Why?"

"You must have seen so many horrible sights — so many dead people, and yet — "

"Well?" he persisted.

"There was something in your face when the man staggered back, a kind of horror almost. I am sure you felt it quite as much as any of us."

He was silent for a moment.

"In a battlefield," he observed slowly, "one naturally becomes a little callous, but here it is different. The fellow did look ghastly ill, didn't he? I wonder what was really the matter with him."

"We shall know when Major Thomson returns," she said.

Granet seemed scarcely to hear her words. A curious fit of abstraction had seized him. His head was turned towards the corridor, he seemed to be waiting.

"Queer sort of stick, Thomson," he remarked presently. "Is he a great friend of yours, Miss Conyers?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"I have known him for some time."

Something in her tone seemed to disturb him. He leaned towards her quickly. His face had lost its good-humoured indifference. He was evidently very much in earnest.

"Please don't think me impertinent," he begged, "but — is he a very great friend?"

She did not answer. She was looking over his shoulder towards where Major Thomson, who had just returned, was answering a little stream of questions.

"The man is in a shockingly weak state," he announced. "He is a Belgian, has been wounded and evidently subjected to great privations. His heart is very much weakened. He had a bad fainting fit, but with a long rest he may recover."

The little party broke up once more into groups. Granet, who had drawn for a moment apart and

seemed to be adjusting the knots of his sling, turned to Thomson.

"Has he recovered consciousness yet?" he asked.

"Barely," was the terse reply.

"There was no special cause for his going off like that, I suppose?"

Surgeon-Major Thomson's silence was scarcely a hesitation. He was standing perfectly still, his eyes fixed upon the young soldier.

"At present," he said, "I am not quite clear about that. If you are ready, Geraldine?"

She nodded and they made their farewells to Lady Anselman. Granet looked after them with a slight frown. He drew his aunt on one side for a moment.

"Why is Miss Conyers here without a chaperon?" he asked. "And why did she go away with Thomson?"

Lady Anselman laughed.

"Didn't she tell you?"

"Tell me what?" he insisted eagerly.

Lady Anselman looked at her nephew curiously.

"Evidently," she remarked, "your progress with the young lady was not so rapid as it seemed, or she would have told you her secret — which, by-the-bye, isn't a secret at all. She and Major Thomson are engaged to be married."

CHAPTER III

A few rays of fugitive sunshine were brightening Piccadilly when Geraldine and her escort left the Ritz. The momentary depression occasioned by the dramatic little episode of a few minutes ago, seemed already to have passed from the girl's manner. She walked on, humming to herself. As they paused to cross the road, she glanced as though involuntarily at her companion. His dark morning clothes and rather abstracted air created an atmosphere of sombreness about him of which she was suddenly conscious.

"Hugh, why don't you wear uniform in town?" she asked.

"Why should I?" he replied. "After all, I am not really a fighting man, you see."

"It's so becoming," she sighed.

He seemed to catch the reminiscent flash in her eyes as she looked down the street, and a shadow of foreboding clouded his mind.

"You found Captain Granet interesting?"

"Very," she assented heartily. "I think he is delightful, don't you?"

"He certainly seems to be a most attractive type of young man," Thomson admitted.

"And how wonderful to have had such adven-

tures!" she continued. "Life has become so strange, though, during the last few months. To think that the only time I ever saw him before was at a polo match, and to-day we sit side by side in a restaurant, and, although he won't speak of them, one knows that he has had all manner of marvellous adventures. He was one of those who went straight from the playing fields to look for glory, wasn't he, Hugh? He made a hundred and thirty-two for Middlesex the day before war was declared."

"That's the type of young soldier who's going to carry us through, if any one can," Major Thomson agreed cheerfully.

She suddenly clutched at his arm.

"Hugh," she exclaimed, pointing to a placard which a newsboy was carrying, "that is the one thing I cannot bear, the one thing which I think if I were a man would turn me into a savage!"

They both paused and read the headlines —

PASSENGER STEAMER TORPEDOED WITHOUT WARNING IN THE IRISH SEA. TWENTY-TWO LIVES LOST.

"That is the sort of thing," she groaned, "which makes one long to be not a man but a god, to be able to wield thunderbolts and to deal out hell!"

"Good for you, Gerry," a strong, fresh voice behind them declared. "That's my job now. Didn't you hear us shouting after you, Olive and I? Look!"

Her brother waved a telegram.

"You've got your ship?" Thomson inquired.

"I've got what I wanted," the young man answered enthusiastically. "I've got a destroyer, one of the new type — forty knots an hour, a dear little row of four-inch guns, and, my God! something else, I hope, that'll teach those murderers a lesson," he added, shaking his fist towards the placard.

Geraldine laid her hand upon her brother's arm.

"When do you join, Ralph?"

"To-morrow night at Portsmouth," he replied. "I'm afraid we shall be several days before we are at work. It's the 'Scorpion' they're giving me, Gerald — or the mystery ship, as they call it in the navy."

"Why?" she asked.

His rather boyish face, curiously like his sister's, was suddenly transformed.

"Because we've got a rod in pickle for those cursed pirates —"

"Conyers!" Thomson interrupted.

The young man paused in his sentence. Thomson was looking towards him with a slight frown upon his forehead.

"Don't think I'm a fearful old woman," he said. "I know we are all rather fed up with these tales of spies and that sort of thing, but do you think it's wise to even open your lips about a certain matter?"

"What the dickens do you know about it?" Conyers demanded.

"Nothing," Thomson assured him hastily, "nothing at all. I am only going by what you said yourself. If there is any device on the 'Scorpion' for

dealing with these infernal craft, I'd never breathe a word about it, if I were you. I'd put out to sea with a seal upon my lips, even before Geraldine here and Miss Moreton."

The young man's cheeks were a little flushed.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "I was a little over-excited. To get the 'Scorpion' was more, even, than I had dared to hope for. Still, before the girls it didn't seem to matter very much. There are no spies, anyhow, hiding in the trees of Berkeley Street," he added, glancing about them.

Thomson held up his finger and stopped a taxicab.

"You won't be annoyed with me, will you?" he said to Conyers. "If you'd heard half the stories I had of the things we have given away quite innocently —"

"That's all right," the young man interrupted, "only you mustn't think I'm a gas-bag just because I said a word or two here before Gerry and Olive and you, old fellow."

"Must you go, Hugh?" Geraldine asked.

"I am so sorry," he replied, "but I must. I really have rather an important appointment this afternoon."

"An appointment!" she grumbled. "You are in London for so short a time and you seem to be keeping appointments all the while. I sha'n't let you go unless you tell me what it's about."

"I have to inspect a new pattern of camp bedstead," he explained calmly. "If I may, I will telephone directly I am free and see if you are at liberty."

She shrugged her shoulders but gave him a pleasant little nod as he stepped into the taxi.

"Sober old stick, Thomson," her brother observed, as they started off. "I didn't like his pulling me up like that but I expect he was right."

"I don't see what business it was of his and I think it was rather horrid of him," Olive declared. "As though Gerry or I mattered!"

"A chap like Thomson hasn't very much discretion, you see," Ralph Conyers remarked. "You'll have to wake him up a bit, Gerry, if you mean to get any fun out of life."

There was just the faintest look of trouble in Geraldine's face. She remained perfectly loyal, however.

"Some of us take life more seriously than others," she sighed. "Hugh is one of them. When one remembers all the terrible things he must have seen, though, it is very hard to find fault with him."

They turned into the Square and paused before Olive's turning.

"You're coming down with me, Ralph, and you too, Geraldine?" she invited.

Conyers shook his head regretfully.

"I'm due at the Admiralty at four to receive my final instructions," he said. "I must move along at once."

The smile suddenly faded from his lips. He seemed to be listening to the calling of the newsboys down the street.

"I don't know what my instructions are going to be," he continued, dropping his voice a little, "but

I'm sick of making war the way our chaps are doing it. If ever I'm lucky enough to get one of those murderous submarines, I can promise you one thing — there'll be no survivors."

For a moment or two they neither of them spoke. From out of the windows of the house before which they were standing came the music of a popular waltz. Olive turned away with a little shiver.

"You think I'm brutal, dear," Conyers went on, as he patted her hand. "Remember I've seen men killed — that's what makes the difference, Olive. Yes, I am different! We are all different, we who've tackled the job. Thomson's different. Your young man at luncheon, Geraldine — what's his name? — Granet — he's different. There's something big and serious grown up inside us, and the brute is looking out. It has to be. I'll come in later, Olive. Tell the mater I shall be home to dinner, Geraldine. The governor's waiting down at the Admiralty for me. Good-bye, girls!"

He waved his hand and strode down towards the corner of the Square. Both girls watched him for a few moments. His shoulders were as square as ever but something had gone from the springiness of his gait. There was nothing left of the sailor's jaunty swagger.

"They are all like that," Geraldine whispered, "when they've been face to face with the real thing And we are only women, Olive."

CHAPTER IV

Surgeon-Major Thomson had apparently forgotten his appointment to view camp bedsteads, for, a few minutes after he had left Geraldine and her brother, his taxicab set him down before a sombre-looking house in Adelphi Terrace. He passed through the open doorway, up two flights of stairs, drew a key of somewhat peculiar shape from his pocket and opened a door in front of him. He found himself in a very small hall, from which there was no egress save through yet another door, through which he passed and stepped into a large but singularly bare-looking apartment. Three great safes were ranged along one side of the wall, piles of newspapers and maps were strewn all over a long table, and a huge Ordnance map of the French and Belgian Frontiers stood upon an easel. The only occupant of the apartment was a man who was sitting before a typewriter in front of the window. He turned his head and rose at Thomson's entrance, a rather short, keen-looking young man, his face slightly pitted with smallpox, his mouth hard and firm, his eyes deep-set and bright.

"Anything happened, Ambrose?"

"A dispatch, sir," was the brief reply.

"From the War Office?"

"No, sir, it came direct."

Thomson drew the thin sheet of paper from its envelope and swept a space for himself at the corner of the table. Then he unlocked one of the safes and drew out from an inner drawer a parchment book bound in brown vellum. He spread out the dispatch and read it carefully. It had been handed in at a town near the Belgian frontier about eight hours before: —

Fifty thousand camp bedsteads are urgently required for neighbourhood of La Guir. Please do your best for us, the matter is urgent. Double mattress if possible. London.

For a matter of ten minutes Thomson was busy with his pencil and the code-book. When he had finished, he studied thoughtfully the message which he had transcribed: —

Plans for attack on La Guir communicated. Attack foiled. Believe Smith in London.

"Anything important, sir?" the young man at the typewriter asked.

Thomson nodded but made no immediate reply. He first of all carefully destroyed the message which he had received, and the transcription, and watched the fragments of paper burn into ashes. Then he replaced the code-book in the safe, which he carefully locked, and strolled towards the window. He stood for several minutes looking out towards the Thames.

"The same thing has happened again at La Guir," he said at last.

"Any clue?"

"None. They say that he is in London now."

The two men looked at one another for a moment in grave silence. Ambrose leaned back in his chair and frowned heavily.

"Through our lines, through Boulogne, across the Channel, through Dover Station, out of Charing-Cross, through our own men and the best that Scotland Yard could do for us. In London, eh?"

Thomson's face twitched convulsively. His teeth had come together with a little snap.

"You needn't play at being headquarters, Ambrose," he said hoarsely. "I know it seems like a miracle but there's a reason for that."

"What is it?" Ambrose asked.

"Only a few weeks after the war began," Thomson continued thoughtfully, "two French generals, four or five colonels, and over twenty junior and non-commissioned officers were court-martialled for espionage. The French have been on the lookout for that sort of thing. We haven't. There isn't one of these men who are sitting in judgment upon us to-day, Ambrose, who would listen to me for a single moment if I were to take the bull by the horns and say that the traitor we seek is one of ourselves."

"You're right," Ambrose murmured, "but do you believe it?"

"I do," Thomson asserted. "It isn't only the fact of the attacks themselves miscarrying, but it's the knowledge on the other side of exactly how best to meet that attack. It's the exact knowledge they have as to our dispositions, our most secret and sud-

den change of tactics. We've suffered enough, Ambrose, in this country from civil spies — the Government are to blame for that. But there are plenty of people who go blustering about, declaring that two of our Cabinet Ministers ought to be hung, who'd turn round and give you the lie if you hinted for a moment that the same sort of thing in a far worse degree was going on amongst men who are wearing the King's uniform."

"It's ugly," Ambrose muttered, "damned ugly!"

"Look at me," Major Thomson continued thoughtfully. "Every secret connected with our present and future plans practically passes through my hands, yet no one watches me. Whisper a word at the War Office that perhaps it would be as well — just for a week, say — to test a few of my reports, and they'd laugh at you with the air of superior beings listening to the chatter of a fool. Yet what is there impossible about it? I may have some secret vice — avarice, perhaps. Germany would give me the price of a kingdom for all that I could tell them. Yet because I am an English officer I am above all suspicion. It's magnificent, Ambrose, but it's damnably foolish."

The young man watched his chief for several moments. Thomson was standing before the window, the cold spring light falling full upon his face, with its nervous lines and strongly-cut, immobile features. He felt a curious indisposition to speak, a queer sort of desire to wait on the chance of hearing more.

"A single kink in my brain," Thomson continued,

"a secret weakness, perhaps even a dash of lunacy, and I might be quite reasonably the master-spy of the world. I was in Berlin six weeks ago, Ambrose. There wasn't a soul who ever knew it. I made no report, on purpose."

"Perhaps they knew and said nothing," Ambrose suggested softly.

There was a moment's silence. Thomson seemed to be considering the idea with strange intensity. Then he shook his head.

"I think not," he decided. "When the history of this war is written, Ambrose, with flamboyant phrases and copious rhetoric, there will be unwritten chapters, more dramatic, having really more direct effect upon the final issue than even the great battles which have seemed the dominant factors. Sit tight here, Ambrose, and wait. I may be going over to Boulogne at any hour."

Thomson pushed on one side the curtains which concealed an inner room, and passed through. In a quarter of an hour he reappeared, dressed in uniform. His tone, his bearing, his whole manner were changed. He walked with a springier step, he carried a little cane and he was whistling softly to himself.

"I am going to one or two places in the Tottenham Court Road, by appointment," he announced, "to inspect some new patterns of camp bedsteads. You can tell them, if they ring up from Whitehall, that I'll report myself later in the evening."

Curiously enough, the other man, too, had changed as though in sympathetic deference to his

superior officer. He had become simply the obedient and assiduous secretary.

"Very good, sir," he said smoothly. "I'll do my best to finish these specifications before you return."

CHAPTER V

Lord Romsey, after his luncheon-party, spent an hour at his official residence in Whitehall and made two other calls on his way home. His secretary met him in the spacious hall of his house in Portland Square, a few moments after he had resigned his coat and hat to the footman.

"There is a gentleman here to see you who says that he made an appointment by telephone, sir," he announced. "His name is Sidney — the Reverend Horatio Sidney, he calls himself."

Lord Romsey stood for a moment without reply. His lips had come together in a hard, unpleasant line. It was obvious that this was by no means a welcome visitor.

"I gave no appointment, Ainsley," he remarked. "I simply said that I would see the gentleman when he arrived in England. You had better bring him to my study," he continued, "and be careful that no one interrupts us."

The young man withdrew and the Cabinet Minister made his way to his study. A little of the elasticity, however, had gone from his footsteps and he seated himself before his desk with the air of a man who faces a disagreeable quarter of an hour. He played for a moment with a pen-holder.

"The skeleton in the cupboard," he muttered to himself gloomily. "Even the greatest of us," he added, with a momentary return of his more inflated self, "have them."

There was a knock at the door and the secretary reappeared, ushering in this undesired visitor.

"This is Mr. Sidney, sir," he announced quietly.

The Cabinet Minister rose in his place and held out his hand in his best official style, a discreet mixture of reserve and condescension. His manner changed, however, the moment the door was closed. He withdrew his hand, which the other had made no attempt to grasp.

"I am according you the interview you desire," he said, pointing to a chair, "but I shall be glad if you will explain the purport of your visit in as few words as possible. You will, I hope, appreciate the fact that your presence here is a matter of grave embarrassment to me."

Mr. Sidney bowed. He was a tall and apparently an elderly man, dressed with the utmost sobriety. He accepted the chair without undue haste, adjusted a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and took some papers from his pocket.

"Sir," he began, speaking deliberately but without any foreign accent, "I am here to make certain proposals to you on behalf of a person who at your own request shall be nameless."

Lord Romsey frowned ponderously and tapped the desk by his side with his thick forefinger.

"I cannot prevent your speaking, of course," he said, "but I wish you to understand from the first

that I am not in a position to deal with any messages or communications from your master, whoever he may be, or any one else in your country."

"Nevertheless," the other remarked drily, "my message must be delivered."

An impulse of curiosity struggled through the gloom and apprehension of Lord Romsey's manner. He gazed at his visitor with knitted brows.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "An Englishman?"

"It is of no consequence," was the colourless reply.

"But it is of consequence," Lord Romsey insisted. "You have dared to proclaim yourself an ambassador to me from a country with whom England is at war. Even a discussion between us amounts almost to treason. On second thoughts I decline to receive you."

He held out his hand towards the electric bell which stood on his study table. His visitor shook his head.

"I wouldn't adopt that attitude, if I were you," he said calmly. "You know why. If you are really curious about my nationality, there is no harm in telling you that I am an American citizen, that I have held for three years the post of American chaplain at Brussels. Better let me say what I have come to say."

Lord Romsey hesitated. His natural propensity for temporising asserted itself and his finger left the bell. The other continued.

"You are in the unfortunate position, Lord Rom-

sey, of having failed absolutely in your duty towards your own country, and having grossly and traitorously deceived a personage who has always treated you with the greatest kindness. I am here to see if it is possible for you to make some amends."

"I deny every word you say," the Minister declared passionately, "and I refuse to hear your proposition."

Mr. Sidney's manner suddenly changed. He leaned forward in his chair.

"Do not be foolish," he advised. "Your last letter to a certain personage was dated June second. I have a copy of it with me. Shall I read it to you, word by word?"

"Thank you, I remember enough of it," Lord Romsey groaned.

"You will listen, then, to what I have to say," the envoy proceeded, "or that letter will be published in the *Times* to-morrow morning. You know what that will mean — your political ruin, your everlasting disgrace. What use will this country, blinded at the present moment by prejudice, have for a statesman who, without authority, pledged his Government to an alliance with Germany, who over his own signature — "

"Stop!" Lord Romsey interrupted. "There is no purpose in this. What is it you want?"

"Your influence in the Cabinet. You are responsible for this war. It is for you to end it."

"Rubbish!" the other exclaimed hoarsely. "You are attempting to saddle me with a responsibility like this, simply because my personal sympathies have

always been on the side of the country you are representing."

"It is not a question of your personal sympathies," Mr. Sidney returned swiftly. "In black and white you pledged your Government to abstain from war against Germany."

"How could I tell," the statesman protested, "that Germany was thinking of tearing up treaties, of entering into a campaign of sheer and scandalous aggression?"

"You made no stipulations or conditions in what you wrote," was the calm reply. "You pledged your word that your Government would never declare war against Germany. You alluded to the French entente as an unnatural one. You spoke eloquently of the kinship of spirit between England and Germany."

Lord Romsey moved uneasily in his chair. He had expected to find this an unpleasant interview and he was certainly not being disappointed.

"Well, I was mistaken," he admitted. "What I said was true enough. I never did believe that the Government with which I was associated would declare war against Germany. Even now, let me tell you that there isn't a soul breathing who knows how close the real issue was. If your people had only chosen any other line of advance!"

"I have not come here to recriminate," Mr. Sidney declared. "That is not my mission. I am here to state our terms for refraining from sending your letters — your personal letters to the Kaiser — to the English Press."

Lord Romsey sprang to his feet.

"Good God, man! Do you know what you are saying?" he exclaimed.

"Perfectly," the other replied. "I told you that my errand was a serious one. Shall I proceed?"

The Minister slowly resumed his seat. From behind the electric lamp his face was ghastly white. In that brief pause which followed he seemed to be looking through the walls of the room into an ugly chapter of his future. He saw the headlines in the newspapers, the leading articles, the culmination of all the gossip and mutterings of the last few months, the end of his political career — a disgraceful and ignoble end! Surely no man had ever been placed in so painful a predicament. It was treason to parley. It was disgraceful to send this man away.

"Germany wants peace," his visitor continued calmly. "She may not have accomplished all she wished to have accomplished by this war, and she is still as strong as ever from a military point of view, but she wants peace. I need say no more than that."

Lord Romsey shook his head.

"Even if I had the influence, which I haven't," he began, "it isn't a matter of the Government at all. The country would never stand it."

"Then you had better convert the country," was the prompt reply. "Look upon it as your duty. Remember this — you are the man in all this world, and not the Kaiser, who is responsible for this war. But for your solemn words pledging your country to neutrality, Germany would never have forced the

issue as she has done. Now it is for you to repair the evil. I tell you that we want peace. The first overtures may come ostensibly through Washington, if you will, but they must come in reality from you."

The Minister leaned back in his chair. His was the calmness of despair.

"You might as well ask me," he said simply, "to order our Fleet out of the North Sea."

Mr. Sidney rose to his feet.

"I think," he advised, "that you had better try what you can do, Lord Romsey. We shall give you a little time. We may even extend it, if we find traces of your influence. You have two colleagues, at least, who are pacifists at heart. Take them on one side, talk in a whisper at first. Plant just a little seed but be careful that it grows. We do not expect impossibilities, only — remember what failure will mean to you."

Lord Romsey looked steadfastly at his visitor. Mr. Sidney was tall and spare, and there was certainly nothing of the Teuton or the American in his appearance or accent. His voice was characterless, his restraint almost unnatural. Relieved of his more immediate fears, the Minister was conscious of a renewed instinct of strong curiosity.

"How can I communicate with you, Mr. — Sidney?" he asked.

"In no way," the other replied. "When I think it advisable I shall come to see you again."

"Are you an American or a German or an Englishman?"

"I am whichever I choose for the moment," was

the cool response. "If you doubt my credentials, I can perhaps establish myself in your confidence by repeating the conversation which took place between you and the Kaiser on the terrace of the Imperial Palace at Potsdam between three and four o'clock on the afternoon of April the seventh. You gave the Kaiser a little character sketch of your colleagues in the Cabinet, and you treated with ridicule the bare idea that one or two of them, at any rate, would ever consent —"

"That will do," the Minister interrupted hoarsely.

"Just as you will," the other observed. "I wish you good-day, sir. The issue is before you now quite plainly. Let us soon be able to appreciate the effect of your changed attitude."

Lord Romsey touched his bell in silence and his visitor took a grave and decorous leave. He walked with the secretary down the hall.

"These are sad days for all of us," he said benignly. "I have been telling Lord Romsey of some of my experiences in Brussels. I was American chaplain at the new church there when the war broke out. I have seen sights which I shall never forget, horrors the memory of which will never leave me."

The secretary nodded sympathetically. He was trying to get off early, however, and he had heard a good deal already about Belgium.

"Will you let one of the servants fetch you a taxicab?" he suggested.

"I prefer to walk a little distance," Mr. Sidney replied. "I am quite at home in London. I was once, in fact, invited to take up a pastorate here. I

wish you good-day, sir. I have had a most interesting conversation with your chief, a conversation which will dwell for a long time in my memory."

The secretary bowed and Mr. Sidney walked slowly to the corner of the Square. Arrived there, he hailed a passing taxicab which drew up at once by the side of the kerb. In stepping in, he brushed the shoulder of a man who had paused to light a cigarette. He lingered for a moment to apologise.

"I beg your pardon," he commenced —

For a single moment his self-possession seemed to desert him. He looked into the cold, incurious face of the man in officer's uniform who was already moving away, as though he had seen a ghost. His hesitation was a matter of seconds only, however.

"It was very clumsy of me," he concluded.

Major Thomson touched his cap as he moved off.

"Quite all right," he said serenely.

CHAPTER VI

The room was a study in masculine luxury. The brown walls were hung with a choice selection of sporting prints, varied here and there with silver-point etchings of beautiful women in various poses. There were a good many photographs, mostly signed, above the mantelpiece; a cigar cabinet, a case of sporting-rifles and shot guns, some fishing tackle, a case of books, distributed appropriately about the apartment. There were some warlike trophies displayed without ostentation, a handsome writing-table on which stood a telephone. On a thick green rug stretched in front of the fireplace, a fox terrier lay blinking at the wood fire. The room was empty and silent except for the slow ticking of an ancient clock which stood underneath an emblazoned coat of arms in the far corner. The end of a log broke off and fell hissing into the hearth. The fox terrier rose reluctantly to his feet, shook himself and stood looking at the smoking fragment in an aggrieved manner. Satisfied that no personal harm was intended to him, however, he presently curled himself up once more. Again the apartment seemed to become the embodiment of repose. The clock, after a hoarse wheezing warning, struck seven. The dog

opened one eye and looked up at it. A few minutes later, the peace of the place was broken in a different fashion. There was the sound of a key being hastily fitted into the lock of the outside door. The dog rose to his feet expectantly. The door which led into the apartment was thrown open and hastily slammed to. A man, breathing heavily, stood for a moment upon the threshold, his head stooped a little as though listening. Then, without a glance, even, at the dog who jumped to greet him, he crossed the room with swift, stealthy footsteps. Before he could reach the other side, however, the door which faced him was opened. A man-servant looked inquiringly out.

"My bath and clothes, Jarvis, like hell!"

The man glided away, his master following close behind. From somewhere further inside the flat, the sound of water running into a bath was heard. The door was closed, again there was silence. The fox terrier, after a few moments' scratching at the door, resumed his place upon the rug and curled himself up to renewed slumber.

The next interruption was of a different nature. The sharp, insistent summons of an electric bell from outside rang through the room. In a moment or two the man-servant appeared from the inner apartment, crossed the floor and presently reappeared, ushering in a visitor.

"Captain Granet is changing for dinner at present, sir," he explained. "If you will take a seat, however, he will be out presently. What name shall I say?"

"Surgeon-Major Thomson."

The servant wheeled an easy-chair up towards the fire and placed by its side a small table on which were some illustrated papers. Then, with a little bow, he disappeared through the inner door. Major Thomson, who had been fingering the *Sketch*, laid it down the moment the door was closed. He leaned forward, his face a little strained. He had the air of listening intently. After a brief absence the man returned.

"Captain Granet will be with you in a few moments, sir," he announced.

"Please ask him not to hurry," Major Thomson begged.

"Certainly, sir."

The man withdrew and once more Thomson and the dog were alone. The latter, having made a few overtures of friendship which passed unnoticed, resumed his slumbers. Major Thomson sat upright in his easy-chair, an illustrated paper in his hand. All the time, however, his eyes seemed to be searching the room. His sense of listening was obviously quickened; he had the air, even, of thinking rapidly. Five — ten minutes passed. Then voices were heard from within and the door was suddenly opened. Captain Granet emerged and crossed the room, hobbling slightly towards his visitor.

"Awfully sorry to keep you like this," he remarked pleasantly. "The fact is I'd just got into my bath."

"I ought to apologise," his visitor replied, "for calling at such a time."

"Glad to see you, anyway," the other declared, pausing at his smoking-cabinet and bringing out some cigarettes. "Try one of these, won't you?"

"Not just now, thanks."

There was a moment's pause. Major Thomson seemed in no hurry to explain himself.

"Jolly luncheon party, wasn't it?" Granet remarked, lighting a cigarette for himself with some difficulty. "What an idiot it makes a fellow feel to be strapped up like this!"

"From what one reads of the fighting around Ypres," the other replied, "you were lucky to get out of it so well. Let me explain, if I may, why I have paid you this rather untimely call."

Captain Granet nodded amiably. He had made himself comfortable in an easy-chair and was playing with the dog, who had jumped on to his knee.

"I had some conversation on Thursday last," Major Thomson began, "with the Provost-Marshal of Boulogne. As you, of course, know, we have suffered a great deal, especially around Ypres, from the marvellous success of the German Intelligence Department. The Provost-Marshal, who is a friend of mine, told me that there was a special warning out against a person purporting to be an American chaplain who had escaped from Belgium. You don't happen to have heard of him, I suppose, do you?"

Captain Granet looked doubtful.

"Can't remember that I have," he replied. "They've been awfully clever, those fellows, though. The last few nights before our little scrap they knew exactly what time our relief parties came

along. Several times we changed the hour. No use! They were on to us just the same."

Major Thomson nodded.

"Well," he continued, "I happened to catch sight of a man who exactly resembled the photograph which my friend the Provost-Marshal showed me, only a few minutes ago, and although I could not be sure of it, I fancied that he entered this building. It occurred to me that he might be paying a call upon you."

Granet shook his head slowly. His eyebrows were just a little upraised.

"Upon me?" he repeated.

"He is an exceedingly plausible fellow," Thomson explained, "and as you are just back from the Front, and brought dispatches, he might very possibly regard you as a likely victim."

"Can't make bricks without straw," Granet laughed, "and I know no more about the campaign than my two eyes have seen. I was saying only yesterday that, unless you have a staff billet, it's wonderful how little the ordinary soldier picks up as to what is going on. As a matter of fact, though," he went on, twisting the fox terrier's ear a little, "no one has called here at all except yourself, during the last hour or two. There aren't many of my pals know I'm back yet."

"Are there many other people living in the building?" Major Thomson asked.

"The ground-floor here," the other replied, "belongs to a prosperous cigarette manufacturer who lives himself upon the first floor. This is the second,

and above us are nothing but the servants' quarters. I should think," he concluded thoughtfully, "that you must have been mistaken about the fellow turning in here at all."

Thomson nodded.

"Very likely," he admitted. "It was just a chance, any way."

"By-the-bye," Granet inquired curiously, looking up from the dog, "how did you know that I roomed here?"

"I happened to see you come in, or was it go out, the other day — I can't remember which," Major Thomson replied.

The telephone upon the table tinkled out a summons. Granet crossed the room and held the receiver to his ear.

"This is Captain Granet speaking," he said. "Who are you, please?"

The reply seemed to surprise him. He glanced across at his visitor.

"I shall be delighted," he answered into the instrument. "It is really very kind of you. . . . About a quarter past eight? . . . Certainly! You'll excuse my not being able to get into mufti, won't you? . . . Ever so many thanks. . . . Good-bye!"

He laid down the receiver and turned to Thomson.

"Rather a coincidence," he observed. "Seems I am going to see you to-night at dinner. That was Miss Geraldine Conyers who just rang up — asked me if I'd like to meet her brother again before he goes off. He is spending the afternoon at the Admiralty and she thought I might be interested."

Major Thomson's face was expressionless and his murmured word non-committal. Granet had approached the dark mahogany sideboard and was fingering some bottles.

"Let me mix you a cocktail," he suggested. "By Jove! that fellow Conyers would be the fellow for your American chaplain to get hold of. If he is spending the afternoon down at the Admiralty, he'll have all the latest tips about how they mean to deal with the submarines. I hear there are at least three or four new inventions which they are keeping dark. You like yours dry, I suppose?"

Thomson had risen to his feet and leaned forward towards the mirror for a moment to straighten his tie. When he turned around, he glanced at the collection of bottles which Granet had been handling.

"I am really very sorry," he said. "I did not mean to put you to this trouble. I never drink cocktails."

Granet paused in shaking the silver receptacle, and laid it down.

"Have a whisky and soda instead?"

Thomson shook his head.

"If you will excuse me," he said, "I will drink your health at dinner-time. I have no doubt that your cocktails are excellent but I never seem to have acquired the habit. What do you put in them?"

"Oh! just both sorts of vermouth and gin, and a dash of something to give it a flavour," Granet explained carelessly.

Thomson touched a small black bottle, smelt it and put it down.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A mixture of absinthe and some West Indian bitters," Granet replied. "A chap who often goes to the States brought it back for me. Gives a cocktail the real Yankee twang, he says."

Thomson nodded slowly.

"Rather a curious odour," he remarked. "We shall meet again, then, Captain Granet."

They walked towards the door. Granet held it open, leaning upon his stick.

"Many times, I trust," he observed politely.

There was a second's pause. His right hand was half extended but his departing guest seemed not to notice the fact. He merely nodded and put on his hat.

"It is a small world," he said, "especially, although it sounds paradoxical, in the big places."

He passed out. Granet listened to the sound of his retreating footsteps with a frown upon his forehead. Then he came back and stood for a moment upon the rug in front of the fire, deep in thought. The fox terrier played unnoticed about his feet. His face seemed suddenly to have become older and more thoughtful. He glanced at the card which Thomson had left upon the sideboard.

"Surgeon-Major Thomson," he repeated quietly to himself. "I wonder!"

Thomson walked slowly to the end of Sackville Street, crossed the road and made his way to the Ritz Hotel. He addressed himself to the head clerk of the reception counter.

"I am Surgeon-Major Thomson," he announced.

"I was lunching here to-day and attended one of the waiters who was taken ill afterwards. I should be very glad to know if I can see him for a few moments."

The man bowed politely.

"I remember you quite well, sir," he said. "A Belgian waiter, was it not? He has been taken away by a lady this afternoon."

"Taken away?" Thomson repeated, puzzled.

"The lady who was giving the luncheon — Lady Anselman — called and saw the manager about an hour ago," the man explained. "She has interested herself very much in the matter of Belgian refugees and is entertaining a great many of them at a house of hers near the seaside. The man is really not fit to work, so we were very glad indeed to pass him on to her."

"He recovered consciousness before he was removed, I suppose?" Thomson inquired.

"I believe so, sir. He seemed very weak and ill, though. In fact he had to be carried to the automobile."

"I suppose he didn't give any reason for his sudden attack?"

"None that I am aware of, sir."

Thomson stood for a moment deep in thought, then he turned away from the desk.

"Thank you very much indeed," he said to the clerk. "The man's case rather interested me. I think I shall ask Lady Anselman to allow me to visit him. Where did you say the house was?"

"Her ladyship did not mention the exact local-

ity," the man replied. "I believe, however, that it is near the Isle of Wight."

"A most suitable neighbourhood," Major Thomson murmured, as he turned away from the hotel.

CHAPTER VII

"I wonder why you don't like Captain Granet?" Geraldine asked her fiancé, as they stood in the drawing-room waiting for dinner.

"Not like him?" Thomson repeated. "Have I really given you that impression, Geraldine?"

The girl nodded.

"Perhaps I ought not to say that, though," she confessed. "You are never particularly enthusiastic about people, are you?"

One of his very rare smiles transfigured his face. He leaned a little towards her.

"Not about many people, Geraldine," he whispered.

She made a charming little grimace but a moment afterwards she was serious again.

"But really," she continued, "to me Captain Granet seems just the type of young Englishman who is going to save the country. He is a keen soldier, clever, modest, and a wonderful sportsman. I can't think what there is about him for any one to dislike."

Major Thomson glanced across the room. In a way, he and the man whom he felt instinctively was in some sense of the word his rival, even though an

undeclared one, were of exactly opposite types. Granet was the centre of a little group of people who all seemed to be hanging upon his conversation. He was full of high spirits and humour, debonair, with all the obvious claims to popularity. Thomson, on the other hand, although good-looking, even distinguished in his way, was almost too slim and pale. His face was more the face of a scholar than of one interested in or anxious to shine in the social side of life. His manners and his speech were alike reserved, his air of breeding was apparent, but he had not the natural ease or charm which was making Granet, even in those few minutes, *persona grata* with Geraldine's mother and a little circle of newly-arrived guests.

"At least I appreciate your point of view," Major Thomson admitted, with a faint sigh.

"Don't be such a dear old stick," Geraldine laughed. "I want you to like him because I find him so interesting. You see, as he gets to know one a little better he doesn't seem to mind talking about the war. You others will scarcely say a word of what you have seen or of what is being done out there. I like to be told things by people who have actually seen them. He happened to be ten minutes early this evening and he gave me a most fascinating description of some skirmishing near La Bassée."

"You must remember," Thomson told her, "that personally I do not, in an ordinary way, see a great deal of fighting until the whole show is over. It may be a fine enough panorama when an attack is actually taking place, but there is nothing very inspiring in

the modern battlefield when the living have passed away from it."

Geraldine shivered for a moment.

"Really, I almost wish that you were a soldier, too," she declared. "Your work seems to me so horribly gruesome. Come along, you know you are going to take me in to dinner. Think of something nice to say. I really want to be amused."

"I will make a suggestion, then," he remarked as they took their places. "I don't know whether you will find it amusing, though. Why shouldn't we do like so many of our friends, and get married?"

She stared at him for a moment. Then she laughed heartily.

"Hugh," she exclaimed, "I can see through you! You've suddenly realised that this is your chance to escape a ceremony and a reception, and all that sort of thing. I call it a most cowardly suggestion."

"It rather appeals to me," he persisted. "It may be," he added, dropping his voice a little, "because you are looking particularly charming this evening, or it may be —"

She looked at him curiously.

"Go on, please," she murmured.

"Or it may be," he repeated, "a man's desire to be absolutely sure of the thing he wants more than anything else in the world."

There was a moment's silence. As though by some curious instinct which they both shared, they glanced across the table to where Granet had become the centre of a little babble of animated conversation. Geraldine averted her eyes almost at once, and looked

down at her plate. There was a shade of uneasiness in her manner.

"You sound very serious, Hugh," she observed.

"That is rather a failing of mine, isn't it?" he replied. "At any rate, I am very much in earnest."

There was another brief silence, during which Geraldine was addressed by her neighbour on the other side. Thomson, who was watching her closely, fancied that she accepted almost eagerly the opportunity of diversion. It was not until dinner was almost over that she abandoned a conversation into which she had thrown herself with spirit.

"My little suggestion," Thomson reminded her, "remains unanswered."

She looked down at her plate.

"I don't think you are really in earnest," she said.

"Am I usually a *farceur?*" he replied. "I think that my tendencies are rather the other way. I really mean it, Gerald. Shall we talk about it later on this evening?"

"If you like," she agreed simply, "but somehow I believe that I would rather wait. Look at mother's eye, roving around the table. Give me my gloves, please, Hugh. Don't be long."

Thomson moved his chair next to his host's. Geraldine's father, Admiral Sir Seymour Conyers, was a very garrulous old gentleman with fixed ideas about everything, a little deaf and exceedingly fond of conversation. He proceeded to give his prospective son-in-law a detailed lecture concerning the mismanagement of the field hospitals at the front, and having disposed of that subject, he

opened a broadside attack upon the Admiralty. The rest of the men showed indications of breaking into little groups. Ralph Conyers and Granet were sitting side by side, engrossed in conversation. More than once Thomson glanced towards them.

"Wish I understood more about naval affairs," Granet sighed. "I'm a perfect ass at any one's job but my own. I can't see how you can deal with submarines at all. The beggars can stay under the water as long as they like, they just pop up and show their heads, and if they don't like the look of anything near, down they go again. I don't see how you can get at them, any way."

The young sailor smiled in a somewhat superior manner.

"We've a few ideas left still which the Germans haven't mopped up," he declared.

"Personally," the Admiral observed, joining in the conversation, "I consider the submarine danger the greatest to which this country has yet been exposed. No one but a nation of pirates, of ferocious and conscienceless Huns, could have inaugurated such a campaign."

"Good for you, dad!" his son exclaimed. "They're a rotten lot of beggars, of course, although some of them have behaved rather decently. There's one thing," he added, sipping his port, "there isn't a job in the world I'd sooner take on than submarine hunting."

"Every one to his taste," Granet remarked good-humouredly. "Give me my own company at my back, my artillery well posted, my reserves in posi-

tion, the enemy not too strongly entrenched, and our dear old Colonel's voice shouting 'At them, boys!' That's my idea of a scrap."

There was a little murmur of sympathy. Ralph Conyers, however, his cigar in the corner of his mouth, smiled imperturbably.

"Sounds all right," he admitted, "but for sheer excitement give me a misty morning, the bows of a forty-knot destroyer cutting the sea into diamonds, decks cleared for action, and old Dick in oilskins on the salute — 'Enemy's submarine, sir, on the port bow, sir.'"

"And what would you do then?" Granet asked.

"See page seven Admiralty instructions this afternoon," the other replied, smiling. "We're not taking it sitting down, I can tell you."

The Admiral rose and pushed back his chair.

"I think," he said, "if you are quite sure, all of you, that you will take no more port, we should join the ladies."

They trooped out of the room together. Thomson kept close behind Ralph Conyers and Captain Granet, who were talking no more of submarines, however, but of the last ballet at the Empire. Geraldine came towards them as they entered the drawing-room.

"Hugh," she begged, passing her arm through his, "would you mind playing bridge? The Mulliners are going on, and mother does miss her rubber so. And we can talk afterwards, if you like," she added.

Thomson glanced across the room to where Granet

was chatting with some other guests. Young Conyers for the moment was nowhere to be seen.

"I'll play, with pleasure, Geraldine," he assented, "but I want to have a word with Ralph first."

"He's at the telephone," she said. "The Admiralty rang up about something and he is talking to them. I'll tell him, if you like, when he comes up."

"If you'll do that," Thomson promised, "I won't keep him a minute."

The little party settled down to their game — Lady Conyers, Sir Charles Hankins, — a celebrated lawyer, — another man and Thomson. Geraldine, with Olive Moreton and Captain Granet, found a sofa in a remote corner of the room and the trio were apparently talking nonsense with great success. Presently Ralph reappeared and joined them.

"Hugh wants to speak to you," Geraldine told him.

Ralph glanced at the little bridge-table and made a grimace.

"Hugh can wait," he declared, as he passed his arm through Olive's. "This is my last night on shore for heaven knows how long and I am going to take Olive off to see my photographs of the 'Scorpion.' Old Wilcock handed them to me out of his drawer this afternoon."

The two young people disappeared. Captain Granet and Geraldine remained upon the couch, talking in low voices. Once Thomson, when he was dummy, crossed the room and approached them. Their conversation was suddenly suspended.

"I told Ralph," Geraldine said, looking up, "that

you wanted to speak to him, but he and Olive have gone off somewhere. By-the-bye, Hugh," she went on curiously, "you didn't tell me that you'd called on Captain Granet this evening."

"Well, it wasn't a matter of vital importance, was it?" he answered, smiling. "My call, in any case, arose from an accident."

"Major Thomson," came a voice from the other side of the room, "it is your deal."

Thomson returned obediently to the bridge-table. The rubber was over a few minutes later and the little party broke up. Thomson glanced around but the room was empty.

"I think, if I may," he said, "I'll go into the morning room and have a whisky and soda. I dare say I'll find the Admiral there."

He took his leave of the others and made his way to the bachelor rooms at the back of the house. He looked first into the little apartment which Geraldine claimed for her own, but found it empty. He passed on into the smoking-room and found all four of the young people gathered around the table. They were so absorbed that they did not even notice his entrance. Ralph, with a sheet of paper stretched out before him and a pencil in his hand, was apparently sketching something. By his side was Granet. The two girls, with arms interlocked, were watching intently.

"You see," Ralph Conyers explained, drawing back for a moment to look at the result of his labours, "this scheme, properly worked out, can keep a channel route such as the Folkestone to Boulogne

one, for instance, perfectly safe. Those black marks are floats, and the nets — "

"One moment, Ralph," Thomson interrupted from the background.

They all started and turned their heads. Thomson drew a step nearer and his hand fell upon the paper. There was a queer look in his face which Geraldine was beginning to recognise.

"Ralph, old fellow," he said, "don't think me too much of an interfering beggar, will you? I don't think even to your dearest friend, not to the girl you are going to marry, to me, or to your own mother, would I finish that little drawing and description, if I were you."

They all stared at him. Granet's face was expressionless, the girls were bewildered, Ralph was frowning.

"Dash it all, Hugh," he expostulated, "do have a little common sense. Here's a fellow like Granet, a keen soldier and one of the best, doing all he can for us on land but a bit worried about our submarine danger. Why shouldn't I try and reassure him, eh? — let him see that we've a few little things up our sleeves? "

"That sounds all right, Ralph," Thomson agreed, "but you're departing from a principle, and I wouldn't do it. It isn't a personal risk you're running, or a personal secret you're sharing with others. It may sound absurd under the present circumstances, I know, but — "

Granet laughed lightly. His arm fell upon the young sailor's shoulder.

"Perhaps Thomson's right, Conyers," he intervened. "You keep your old scheme at the back of your head. We'll know all about it when the history of the war's written. There's always the thousand to one chance, you know. I might get brain fever in a German hospital and begin to babble. Tear it up, old fellow."

There was a moment's silence. Geraldine turned to Thomson.

"Hugh," she protested, "don't you think you're carrying principle almost too far? It's so fearfully interesting for us when Ralph's at sea, and we wait day by day for news from him, to understand a little what he's doing."

"I think you're a horrid nuisance, Major Thomson," Olive grumbled. "We'd just reached the exciting part."

"I am sorry," Thomson said, "but I think, Ralph, you had better do what Captain Granet suggested."

The young man shrugged his shoulders, his face was a little sulky. He took the plan up and tore it into pieces.

"If you weren't my prospective brother-in-law, you know, Thomson," he exclaimed, "I should call your interference damned cheek! After all, you know, you're only a civilian, and you can't be expected to understand these things."

Thomson was silent for a moment. He read in the others' faces their sympathy with the young sailor's complaint. He moved towards the door.

"I am sorry," he said simply. "Good night, everybody!"

They all wished him good-night — nobody stirred. He walked slowly into the front hall, waited for a moment and then accepted his coat and hat from a servant. Lady Conyers waved to him from the staircase.

"Where's Geraldine?" she asked.

Thomson turned away.

"They are all in the smoking-room, Lady Conyers," he said. "Good night!"

CHAPTER VIII

In a way, their meeting the next morning was fortuitous enough, yet it had also its significance for both of them. Geraldine's greeting was almost studiously formal.

"You are not going to scold me for my memory, are you?" Captain Granet asked, looking down at her with a faintly humourous uplifting of the eyebrows. "I must have exercise, you know."

"I don't even remember telling you that I came into the Park in the mornings," Geraldine replied.

"You didn't — that is to say you didn't mention the Park particularly," he admitted. "You told me you always took these five dogs out for a walk directly after breakfast, and for the rest I used my intelligence."

"I might have gone into Regent's Park or St. James's Park," she reminded him.

"In which case," he observed, "I should have walked up and down until I had had enough of it, and then gone away in a bad temper."

"Don't be foolish," she laughed. "I decline absolutely to believe that you had a single thought of me when you turned in here. Do you mind if I say that I prefer not to believe it?"

He accepted the reproof gracefully.

"Well, since we do happen to have met," he suggested, "might I walk with you a little way? You see," he went on, "it's rather dull hobbling along here all alone."

"Of course you may, if you like," she assented, glancing sympathetically at his stick. "How is your leg getting on?"

"It's better — getting on finely. So far as my leg is concerned, I believe I shall be fit to go out again within ten days. It's my arm that bothers me a little. One of the nerves, the doctor said, must be wrong. I can only just lift it. You've no idea," he went on, "how a game leg and a trussed-up arm interfere with the little round of one's daily life. I can't ride, can't play golf or billiards, and for an unintelligent chap like me," he wound up with a sigh, "there aren't a great many other ways of passing the time."

"Why do you call yourself unintelligent?" she protested. "You couldn't have got through your soldiering so well if you had been."

"Oh! I know all the soldier stuff," he admitted, "know my job, that is to say, all right, and of course I am moderately good at languages, but that finishes me. I haven't any brains like your friend Thomson, for instance."

"Major Thomson is very clever, I believe," she said a little coldly.

"And a little censorious, I am afraid," Granet added with a slight grimace. "I suppose he thinks I am a garrulous sort of ass but I really can't see why he needed to go for your brother last night

just because he was gratifying a very reasonable curiosity on my part. It isn't as though I wasn't in the Service. The Army and the Navy are the same thing, any way, and we are always glad to give a Navy man a hint as to how we are getting on."

"I really couldn't quite understand Major Thomson myself," she agreed.

"May I ask — do you mind?" he began, — "have you been engaged to him long?"

She looked away for a moment. Her tone, when she replied, was meant to convey some slight annoyance at the question.

"About three months."

Captain Granet kicked a pebble away from the path in front of him with his sound foot.

"I should think he must be a very good surgeon," he remarked in a measured tone. "Looks as though he had lots of nerve, and that sort of thing. To tell you the truth, though, he rather frightens me. I don't think that he has much sympathy with my type."

She became a little more indulgent and smiled faintly as she looked at him.

"I wonder what your type is?" she asked reflectively.

"Fairly obvious, I am afraid," he confessed, with a sigh. "I love my soldiering, of course, and I am ashamed to think how keen I have been on games, and should be still if I had the chance. Outside that I don't read much, I am not musical, and I am very much predisposed to let the future look after itself. There are thousands just like me," he continued

thoughtfully. "We don't do any particular harm in the world but I don't suppose we do much good."

"Don't be silly," she protested. "For one thing, it is splendid to be a capable soldier. You are just what the country wants to-day. But apart from that I am quite sure that you have brains."

"Have I?" he murmured. "Perhaps it's the incentive I lack."

They were silent for a few moments. Then they began to talk more lightly. They discussed dogs and horses, their mutual friends, and their engagements for the next few days. They did not once refer to Thomson. Presently Geraldine paused to speak to some friends. Granet leaned upon his stick in the background and watched her. She was wearing a plain tailor made suit and a becoming little hat, from underneath which little wisps of golden hair had somehow detached themselves in a fascinating disorder. There was a delicate pink colour in her cheeks, the movements and lines of her body were all splendidly free and graceful. As she talked to her friends her eyes for the moment seemed to have lost their seriousness. Her youth had reasserted itself — her youth and splendid physical health. He watched her eagerly, and some shadow seemed to pass from his own face — the shadow of his suffering or his pain. He, too, seemed to grow younger. The simplest and yet the most wonderful joy in life was thrilling him. At last she bade farewell to her friends and came smiling towards him.

"I am so sorry to have kept you all this time!" she exclaimed. "Lady Anne has just told me the

time and I am horrified. I meant to walk here for an hour and we have been here for two. Stop that taxi for me, please. I cannot spare the time even to walk home."

He handed her into the cab and whistled for the dogs, who all scrambled in after her.

"Thanks so much for looking after a helpless cripple," he said pleasantly, as they shook hands. "You mustn't grudge the time. Doing your duty to the country, you know."

He tactfully avoided any mention of a future meeting and was rewarded with a little wave of her hand from the window of the cab. He himself left the Park at the same time, strolled along Piccadilly as far as Sackville Street and let himself into his rooms. His servant came forward to meet him from the inner room, and took his cap and stick.

"Any telephone messages, Jarvis?"

"Nothing, sir."

Granet moved towards the easy-chair. On the way he stopped. The door of one of the cupboards in the sideboard was half open. He frowned.

"Haven't I told you, Jarvis, that I wish those cupboards kept locked?" he asked a little curtly.

The man was staring towards the sideboard in some surprise.

"I am very sorry, sir," he said. "I certainly believed that I locked it last night."

Granet opened it wide and looked inside. His first glance was careless enough, then his expression changed. He stared incredulously at the small array of bottles and turned swiftly around.

"Have you moved anything from here?"

"Certainly not, sir," was the prompt reply.

Granet closed the cupboard slowly. Then he walked to the window for a moment, his hands behind his back.

"Any one been here this morning at all, Jarvis?" he inquired.

"A man for the laundry, sir, and a person to test the electric light."

"Left alone in the room at all?"

"The electric light man was here for a few minutes, sir."

The master and servant exchanged quick glances. The latter was looking pale and nervous.

"Is anything missing, sir?" he asked.

"Yes!" Granet replied. "Did you notice the gentleman who called last evening — Surgeon-Major Thomson?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You haven't seen him since? He hasn't been here?"

"No, sir!"

Granet stood, for a moment, thinking. The servant remained motionless. The silence in the room was ominous; so, also, was the strange look of disquietude in the two men's faces.

"Jarvis," his master said at last, "remember this. I am not finding fault. I know you are always careful. But from to-night be more vigilant than ever. There is a new hand in the game. He may not suspect us yet but he will. You understand, Jarvis?"

"Perfectly, sir."

The man withdrew noiselessly. Once more Granet walked to the window. He looked down for a few minutes at the passers-by but he saw nothing. Grave thoughts were gathering together in his mind. He was travelling along the road of horrors and at the further end of it a man stood waiting. He saw himself draw nearer and nearer to the meeting. His face unwittingly darkened, he clenched his fists. A name almost framed itself upon his lips, the name of the man whom he had grown to hate.

CHAPTER IX

Considering the crowded state of the waiting-room and the number of highly important people who were there for the same purpose, Surgeon-Major Thomson seemed to have remarkably little difficulty in procuring the interview he desired. He was conducted by a boy scout into a room on the second floor of the War Office, within a few minutes of his arrival. A tall, grey-haired man in the uniform of a general looked up and nodded with an air of intimacy as soon as the door had been closed.

"Sit down, Thomson. We've been expecting you. Any news?"

"I have come to you for that, sir," the other replied.

The General sighed.

"I am afraid you will be disappointed," he said. "I received your report and I went to a certain official myself — saw him in his own house before breakfast this morning. I had reports of three other men occupying responsible positions in the city, Thomson, against whom there was really tangible and serious evidence. Our friend had the effrontery almost to laugh at me."

There was a little glitter in Thomson's eyes.

"These damned civilians!" he murmured softly. "They've done their best to ruin Great Britain by crabbing every sort of national service during the last ten years. They feed and pamper the vermin who are eating away the foundations of the country, and, damn it all, when we put a clear case to them, when we show them men whom we know to be dangerous, they laugh at us and tell us that it isn't our department! They look upon us as amateurs and speak of Scotland Yard with bated breath. My God! If I had a free hand for ten minutes, there'd be two Cabinet Ministers eating bread and water instead of their dinners to-night."

The General raised his eyebrows. He knew Thomson well enough to be aware how unusual such an ebullition of feeling on his part was.

"Got you a bit worked up, Major," he remarked.

"Isn't it enough to make any man's blood boil?" the other replied. "The country to-day looks to its army and its navy to save it from the humiliation these black-coated parasites have encouraged, and yet even now we haven't a free hand. You and I, who control the secret service of the army, denounce certain men, upon no slight evidence, either, as spies, and we are laughed at! One of those very blatant idiots whose blundering is costing the country millions of money and thousands of brave men, has still enough authority to treat our reports as so much waste paper."

"I am bound to say I agree with you, Thomson," the General declared, a little hopelessly. "It's the weakest spot of our whole organisation, this depend-

ing upon the civil powers. Two of my cases were absolutely flagrant. As regards yours, Thomson, I am not at all sure that we shouldn't be well-advised to get just a little more evidence before we press the matter."

"And meanwhile," Thomson retorted bitterly, "leave him a free hand to do what mischief he can. But for the merest accident in the world, the night before last he would have learnt our new scheme for keeping the Channel communication free from submarines."

The General frowned.

"Who's been talking?" he demanded.

"No one who is to be blamed," Thomson replied. "Can't you realise the position? Here's a fellow Service man, a soldier, a D. S. O., who has been specially mentioned for bravery and who very nearly got the Victoria Cross, comes here with the halo of a brilliant escape from the Germans, wounded, a young man of good family and connections, and apparently as keen as mustard to get back again in the fighting line. Good Heavens! The most careful sailor in the world might just drop a hint to that sort of man. What nearly happened last night may happen a dozen times within the next week. Even our great secret, General," Thomson continued, dropping his voice a little, "even that might come to his ears."

The General was undoubtedly disturbed. He searched amongst the papers on his desk and brought out at last a flimsy half-sheet of notepaper which he studied carefully.

"Just read this, Thomson."

Thomson rose and looked over his shoulder. The letter was an autograph one of a few lines only, and dated from a village in the North of France —

My dear Brice,

This is a special request to you. Arrange it any way you please but don't send me Captain Granet out again in any capacity. Keep him at home. Mind, I am not saying a word against him as a soldier. He has done some splendid work on more than one occasion, but notwithstanding this I do not wish to see him again with any of the forces under my command.

Ever yours,

F.

"Did you show this to our friend?" Thomson inquired.

"I gave him a digest of its contents," the General replied. "He smiled in a supercilious manner and said I had better do as I was asked."

Thomson said nothing for a moment. His face was very set and he had the air of a man desperately but quietly angry.

"As a matter of fact," General Brice continued, glancing at the clock on his desk, "Granet is in my anteroom at the present moment, I expect. He asked for an interview this afternoon."

"Have him in, if you don't mind," the other suggested. "I can sit at the empty desk over there. I can be making some calculations with reference to the number of hospital beds for each transport. I want to hear him talk to you."

The General nodded and touched a bell.

"You can show Captain Granet in," he told the boy scout who answered it.

Thomson took his place in the far corner of the room and bent over a sheaf of papers. Presently Granet was ushered in. He was leaning a little less heavily upon his stick and he had taken his arm from the sling for a moment. He saluted the General respectfully and glanced across the room towards where Thomson was at work. If he recognised him, however, he made no sign.

"Well, Granet," the General inquired, "how are you getting on?"

"Wonderfully, sir," was the brisk reply. "I have seen my own doctor this morning and he thinks I might come up before the Board on Saturday."

"And what does that mean?"

"I want to get back again, sir," Granet replied eagerly.

The General stroked his grey moustache and looked searchingly at the young officer. He was standing full in the light of a ray of sunshine which came streaming through the high, uncurtained windows. Although he was still a little haggard, his eyes were bright, his lips were parted in an anticipatory smile, his whole expression was engaging. General Brice, studying him closely, felt compelled to admit the improbability of his vague suspicions.

"That's all very well, you know," he reminded him quietly, "but you won't be fit enough for active service for some time to come."

The young man's face fell.

"I am sure they must be wanting me back, sir," he said naïvely.

The General shook his head.

"I don't want to disappoint you, young fellow," he continued, "but I heard from your Brigadier only yesterday. He has been obliged to fill up your place and I don't think he has room for any one on his staff."

Granet looked a little hurt.

"I thought he might have made a temporary appointment," he said gloomily.

"This is no time to consider individuals," the General pointed out. "What about finding you a billet at home for a time, eh? You've seen a bit of the rough side of the war, you know."

"I'd sooner go out and dig trenches!"

Thomson had risen slowly from his place and, with a sheet of foolscap in his hand, closely covered with writing, crossed the room.

"You might get taken prisoner again, Captain Granet," he remarked drily.

There was a moment's rather tense silence. The young man's lips had come together, his eyes flashed.

"I did not recognise you, Major Thomson," he said calmly. "Have you found a new billet?"

"My old one is sufficiently absorbing just at present," the other replied, laying his calculations on the General's desk. "Forgive my interrupting you, sir, but you told me to let you have this as soon as I had finished. That is my estimate of the number of beds we could stow away in the cubic feet you offer us."

The General glanced at the paper and nodded.

"Don't go, Thomson," he said. "I'll talk to you about this later on. Well, Captain Granet," he added, "you'd better leave things in my hands. I'll do the best I can for you."

"I shall be very disappointed if I don't get out to the Front again soon, sir," the young man declared simply.

"I'll do the best I can," the General repeated, touching his bell.

Granet was shown out and the door was closed. General Brice turned towards his companion.

"Thomson," he said, "frankly, I can't believe it. However, we'll find him a billet where he can't possibly do any mischief."

"If you found him a billet where I should like to see him," Surgeon-Major Thomson observed bitterly, "he would never do any more mischief in this world! Any dispatches for the Front, sir?"

General Brice raised his eyebrows.

"Are you off again?" he asked.

"I am going to see that young man's General," Thomson replied. "I shall cross over to-day and be back to-morrow night or Saturday morning."

General Brice nodded thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you are right," he assented. "Yes, I shall have a few reports. You'd better let them know at the Admiralty, and what time you want to go over."

Surgeon-Major Thomson shook hands with the General and turned towards the door.

"When I come back," he said, "I hope I'll be able to convince even you, sir."

CHAPTER X

Surgeon-Major Thomson awoke about twelve hours later with a start. He had been sleeping so heavily that he was at first unable to remember his whereabouts. His mind moved sluggishly across the brief panorama of his hurried journey — the special train from Victoria to Folkestone; the destroyer which had brought him and a few other soldiers across the Channel, black with darkness, at a pace which made even the promenade deck impossible; the landing at Boulogne, a hive of industry notwithstanding the darkness; the clanking of waggons, the shrieking of locomotives, the jostling of crowds, the occasional flashing of an electric torch. And then the ride in the great automobile through the misty night. He rubbed his eyes and looked around him. A grey morning was breaking. The car had come to a standstill before a white gate, in front of which was stationed a British soldier, with drawn bayonet. Surgeon-Major Thomson pulled himself together and answered the challenge.

"A friend," he answered, — "Surgeon-Major Thomson, on his Majesty's service."

He leaned from the car for a moment and held out something in the hollow of his hand. The man saluted and drew back. The car went on along a

rough road which led across a great stretch of pastureland. On the ridge of the hills on his right, little groups of men were at work unlimbering guns. Once or twice, with a queer, screeching sound, a shell, like a little puff of white smoke, passed high over the car and fell somewhere in the grey valley below. In the distance he could see the movements of a body of troops through the trees, soldiers on the way to relieve their comrades in the trenches. As the morning broke, the trenches themselves came into view — long, zig-zag lines, silent, and with no sign of the men who crawled about inside like ants. He passed a great brewery transformed into a canteen, from which a line of waggons, going and returning, were passing all the time backwards and forwards into the valley. Every now and then through the stillness came the sharp crack of a rifle from the snipers lying hidden in the little stretches of woodland and marshland away on the right. A motor-omnibus, with its advertisement signs still displayed but a great red cross floating above it, came rocking down the road on its way to the field hospital in the distance. As yet, however, the business of fighting seemed scarcely to have commenced.

They passed several small houses and farms, in front of each of which was stationed a sentry. Once, from the hills behind, a great white-winged aeroplane glided over his head on its way to make a reconnaissance. Queerest sight of all, here and there were peasants at work in the fields. One old man leaned upon his spade and watched as the car passed. Not a dozen yards from him was a great

hole in the ground where a shell had burst, and a little further away a barn in ruins. The car was forced to stop here to let a cavalcade of ammunition waggons pass by. Surgeon-Major Thomson leaned from his seat and spoke to the old man.

"You are not afraid of the German shells, then?" he asked.

"Monsieur," the old man answered, "one must live or die — it does not matter which. For the rest, if one is to live, one must eat. Therefore I work. Four sons I have and a nephew away yonder," he added, waving his hand southwards. "That is why I dig alone. Why do you not send us more soldiers, Monsieur l'Anglais?"

"Wait but a little time longer," Thomson answered cheerfully.

The old man looked sadly at his ruined barn.

"It is always 'wait,'" he muttered, "and one grows old and tired. *Bonjour, monsieur!*"

The car passed on again and suddenly dropped into a little protected valley. They came to a standstill before a tiny chateau, in front of which stretched what might once have been an ornamental garden, but which was now torn to pieces by gun carriages, convoy waggons, and every description of vehicle. From the top of the house stretched many wires. A sentry stood at the iron gates and passed Major Thomson after a perfunctory challenge. An officer with mud-stained boots and wind-tossed hair, who looked as though he had been out all night, stood on the steps of the house and welcomed Thomson.

"Hullo, Major," he called out, "just across, eh?"

"This moment," Thomson assented. "Anything fresh?"

"Nothing to speak of," the other replied. "We've just had a message in that the French have been giving them a knock. We've had a quiet time the last two days. They're bringing up some more Bavarians, we think."

"Do you think I could have a few words with the General?" Major Thomson asked.

"Come in and have some coffee. Yes, he'll see you, of course. He is in his own room with two of the flying men, just for the moment. I'll let you know when you can go in."

They passed into an apartment which had once been the dining-room of the chateau, and in which a long table was laid. One or two staff officers greeted Thomson, and the man who had brought him in attended to his wants.

"The General had his breakfast an hour ago," the latter observed. "We're pretty well forward here and we have to keep on the *qui vive*. We got some shells yesterday dropped within a quarter of a mile of us. I think we're going to try and give them a push back on the left flank. I'll go in and see about you, Thomson."

"Good fellow! You might tell them to give my chauffeur something. The destroyer that brought me over is waiting at Boulogne, and I want to be in London to-night."

One of the officers from the other side of the table, smiled queerly.

"London! My God!" he muttered. "There is still a London, I suppose? Savoy and Carlton going still? Pall Mall where it was?"

"And very much as it was," Thomson assured him. "London's wonderfully unchanged. You been out long?"

"September the second," was the cheerful reply. "I keep on getting promised a week but I can't bring it off."

"He's such a nut with the telephones," the man by his side explained, helping himself to marmalade. "The General positively can't spare him."

"Oh, chuck it!" the other exclaimed in disgust. "What about you? — the only man with an eye to a Heaven-ordained gun position, as old Wattles declared one day. We're all living wonders, Major," he went on, turning to Thomson, "but if I don't get a *Sole Colbert* and a grill at the Savoy, and a front seat at the Alhambra, before many weeks have passed, I shall get stale — that's what'll happen to me."

"Hope you'll have your hair cut before you go back," a man from the other end of the table remarked. "Your own mother wouldn't know you like that — much less your sweetheart."

The young man fingered his locks reflectively.

"Chap who was going to cut it for me got shot yesterday," he grumbled. "Anything doing as you came over the ridge, Major?"

Thomson shook his head.

"One aeroplane and a few shells."

"That would be Johnny Oates going out in his Blériot," some one remarked. "He'll be back here before long with a report."

The officer who had met Thomson in the garden, re-entered the room.

"General says he'll see you at once," he announced.

Thomson followed his guide into a small back room. An officer was seated before a desk, writing, another was shouting down a telephone, and a third was making some measurements upon a large Ordnance map nailed upon one of the walls. The General was standing with his back to the fire and a pipe in his mouth. He nodded cheerily to Thomson.

"When did you leave London?" he asked.

"Nine o'clock last evening, sir," Thomson replied. "Rather a record trip. We had a special down and a destroyer over."

"And I'm to tell you what you want to know," the General continued, glancing at a document in his hand. "Well, close the door, Harewood. Out with it?"

"It's about Captain Granet of Harrison's staff," Thomson began.

The General frowned and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Well," he asked, "what is it?"

"We've reasons of our own for wishing to know exactly what you meant by asking the War Office not to send him back again," Thomson continued.

The General hesitated.

"Well, what are they?"

"They are a little intangible, sir," Thomson confessed, "but exceedingly important. Without any direct evidence, I have come to the conclusion that Captain Granet is a mysterious person and needs watching. As usual, we are in trouble with the civil authorities, and, to be frank with you, I am trying to strengthen my case."

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he decided, "under the circumstances you have the right to know what my message meant. We sent Granet back because of a suspicion which may be altogether unjustifiable. The suspicion was there, however, and it was sufficiently strong for me to make up my mind that I should prefer not to have him back again. Now you shall know the facts very briefly. Granet was taken prisoner twice. No one saw him taken — as a matter of fact, both of the affairs were night attacks. He seemed suddenly to disappear — got too far ahead of his men, was his explanation. All I can say is that he was luckier than most of them. Anything wandering about loose in a British uniform — but there, I won't go on with that. He came back each time with information as to what he had seen. Each time we planned an attack on the strength of that information. Each time that information proved to be misleading and our attack failed, costing us heavy losses. Of course, dispositions might have been changed since his observations were made, but there the fact remains. Further," the General continued, filling his pipe slowly and pressing in the

tobacco, "on the second occasion we had four hundred men thrown forward into the village of Ossray. They were moved in the pitch darkness, and silently. It was impossible for any word of their presence in Ossray to have been known to the Germans. Yet the night of Granet's capture the village was shelled, and those who escaped were cut off and made prisoners. Follow me, Major?"

"Yes, sir!" Thomson acquiesced.

"Those are just the facts," the General concluded. "Now on the other hand, Granet has handled his men well, shown great personal bravery, and has all the appearance of a keen soldier. I hate to do him a wrong even in my thoughts but there were others besides myself to whom these coincidences seemed amazing. We simply decided that they'd better give Granet a billet at home. That's the reason of my message."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," Thomson said slowly. "You have given me exactly the information which we desire."

The General was called away for a moment to give some instructions to the young officer who was sitting in a distant corner of the room with a telephone band around his head. He signed to Thomson, however, to remain.

"Now that I have gratified your curiosity," he said, when he returned, "perhaps you will gratify mine? Will you tell me just how you over in England have come to have suspicions of this man?"

"That," Thomson explained, "is almost a personal matter with me. Three months ago I spent

the night with the Third Army Corps up by Niemen. I was there on other business, as you may imagine, but there was some hot fighting and I went out to help. I was attending to some of our fellows and got very near to the German lines. I became separated from the others a little and was groping about when I heard voices talking German within a few feet of me. I couldn't hear what they said but I could just distinguish two figures. One of them made off towards the German lines. The other, after standing still for a moment, came in my direction. I took out my revolver, and to tell you the truth I very nearly fired on sight, for it would have been an exceedingly awkward matter for me to have been taken prisoner just then. Just as my finger was on the trigger, I became conscious that the man who was approaching was humming 'Tipperary.' I flashed my light on his face and saw at once that he was a British officer. He addressed me quickly in German. I answered him in English. I fancied for a moment that he seemed annoyed. 'We'd better get out of this,' he whispered. 'We're within a hundred yards of the German trenches and they are bringing searchlights up.' 'Who were you talking to just now?' I asked, as we stole along. 'No one at all,' he answered. I didn't take the thing seriously for the moment, although it seemed to me queer. Afterwards I regretted, however, that I hadn't set myself to discover the meaning of what was apparently a deliberate lie. The next time I met Granet was at a luncheon party at the Ritz, a few days ago. I recognised his face at once, al-

though I had only seen it by the flash of my electric lamp. From that moment I have had my suspicions."

The General nodded. He was looking a little grave.

"It's a hateful thing to believe," he said, "that any one wearing his Majesty's uniform could ever play such a dastardly part. However, on the whole I am rather glad that I passed in that request to the War Office. Anything more we can do for you, Major?"

Thomson took the hint and departed. A few minutes later he was in his car and on his way back to Boulogne.

CHAPTER XI

Olive Moreton gave a little start as the long, grey, racing car came noiselessly to a standstill by the side of the kerbstone. Captain Granet raised his hat and leaned from the driving seat towards her.

"Hope I didn't frighten you, Miss Moreton?"

"Not at all," she replied. "What a perfectly lovely car!"

He assented eagerly.

"Isn't she! My uncle's present to me to pass away the time until I can do some more soldiering. They only brought it round to me early this morning. Can I take you anywhere?"

"I was just going to see Geraldine Conyers," she began.

"Do you know, I guessed that," he remarked, leaning on one side and opening the door. "Do let me take you. I haven't had a passenger yet."

She stepped in at once.

"As a matter of fact," she told him, "I was looking for a taxicab. I have had a telegram from Ralph. He wants us to go down to Portsmouth by the first train we can catch this morning. He says that if we can get down there in time to have lunch at two o'clock, he can show us over the 'Scorpion.'

After to-day she will be closed to visitors, even his own relations. I was just going to see if Geraldine could come."

Granet was thoughtful for a moment. He glanced at the little clock on the dashboard opposite to him.

"I tell you what," he suggested, "why not let me motor you and Miss Conyers down? I don't believe there's another fast train before one o'clock, and we'd get down in a couple of hours, easily. It's just what I'm longing for, a good stretch into the country."

"I should love it," the girl exclaimed, "and I should think Geraldine would. Will you wait while I run in and see her?"

"Of course," Granet replied. "Here we are, and there's Miss Conyers at the window. You go in and talk her over and I'll just see that we've got lots of petrol. I'll have you down there within two hours, all right, if we can get away before the roads are crowded."

She hurried into the house. Geraldine met her on the threshold and they talked together for a few moments. Then Olive reappeared, her face beaming.

"Geraldine would simply love it," she announced. "She will be here in five minutes. Could we just stop at my house for a motor-coat?"

"Certainly!" Granet agreed, glancing at his watch. "This is absolutely ripping! We shall be down there by one o'clock. Why is this to be Conyers' last day for entertaining?"

"I don't know," she answered indifferently. "Some Admiralty regulation, I suppose."

He sighed.

"After all," he declared, "I am not sure whether I chose the right profession. There is so much that is mysterious about the Navy. They are always inventing something or trying something new."

Geraldine came down the steps, waving her hand.

"This is the most delightful idea!" she exclaimed, as Granet held the door open. "Do you really mean that you are going to take us down to Portsmouth and come and see Ralph?"

"I am not going to worry your brother," he answered, smiling, "but I am going to take you down to Portsmouth, if I may. We shall be there long before you could get there by train, and — well, what do you think of my new toy?"

"Simply wonderful," Geraldine declared. "Olive told me that your uncle had just given it you. What a lucky person you are, Captain Granet!"

He laughed a little shortly as they glided off.

"Do you think so?" he answered. "Well, I am lucky in my uncle, at any rate. He is one of those few people who have a great deal of money and don't mind spending it. I was getting bored to death with my game leg and arm, and certainly this makes one forget both of them. Six cylinders, you see, Miss Conyers, and I wouldn't like to tell you what we can touch if we were pressed."

"You won't frighten us," Geraldine assured him.

Granet glanced once more at the clock in front of him.

"For a time," he remarked, "I am your chauffeur. I just want to see what she'll do — to experiment a little."

From that point conversation became scanty. The girls leaned back in their seats. Granet sat bolt upright, with his eyes fixed upon the road. Shortly before one o'clock they entered Portsmouth.

"The most wonderful ride I ever had in my life!" Geraldine exclaimed.

"Marvellous!" Olive echoed. "Captain Granet, Ralph promised that there should be a pinnace at number seven dock from one until three."

Granet pointed with his finger.

"Number seven dock is there," he said, "and there's the pinnace. I shall go back to the hotel for lunch and wait for you there."

"You will do nothing of the sort," Geraldine insisted. "Ralph would be furious if you didn't come with us."

"Of course!" Olive interposed. "How could you think of anything so ridiculous! It's entirely owing to you that we were able to get here."

Captain Granet looked for a moment doubtful.

"You see, just now," he explained, "I know the regulations for visiting ships in commission are very strict. Perhaps an extra visitor might embarrass your brother."

"How can you be so absurd!" Geraldine protested. "You — a soldier! Why, of course he'd be delighted to have you."

Granet swung the car around into the archway of a hotel exactly opposite the dock.

"All right," he agreed. "We'll leave the car here. Of course, I'd like to come all right."

They crossed the cobbled street and made their way to the dock. The pinnace was waiting for them and in a very few minutes they were on their way across the harbour. The "Scorpion" was lying well away from other craft, her four squat funnels emitting faint wreaths of smoke. She rode very low in the water and her appearance was certainly menacing.

"Personally," Geraldine observed, leaning a little forward to look at her, "I think a destroyer is one of the most vicious, the most hideous things I ever saw. I do hope that Ralph will be quick and get a cruiser."

"Is that the 'Scorpion' just ahead of us?" Granet asked.

Geraldine nodded.

"Did you ever see anything so ugly? She looks as though she would spit out death from every little crevice."

"She's a fine boat," Granet muttered. "What did your brother say she could do?"

"Thirty-nine knots," Geraldine replied. "It seems wonderful, doesn't it?"

The officer in charge of the pinnace smiled.

"Our speeds are only nominal, any way," he remarked. "If our chief engineer there had the proper message, there's none of us would like to say what he could get out of those new engines."

He turned and shouted an order. In a moment or two they swung around and drew up by the side

of the vessel. Ralph waved his hand to them from the top of the gangway.

"Well done, you people!" he exclaimed. "Hullo, Granet! Have you brought the girls down?"

"In the most wonderful racing car you ever saw!" Geraldine told him, as they climbed up the gangway. "We shouldn't have been here for hours if we had waited for the train."

"I met Captain Granet this morning by accident," Olive explained, as she stepped on deck, "and he insisted on bringing us down."

"I hope I'm not in the way at all?" Granet asked anxiously. "If I am, you have only to say the word and put me on shore, and I'll wait, with pleasure, until the young ladies come off. I have a lot of pals down here, too, I could look up."

"Don't be silly," Conyers replied. "Our dear old lady friend Thomson isn't here to worry so I think we can make you free of the ship. Come along down and try a cocktail. Mind your heads. We're not on a battleship, you know. You will find my quarters a little cramped, I'm afraid."

They drank cocktails cheerfully, and afterwards Geraldine and Granet made their way back on deck.

"How any one can live in that atmosphere!" Geraldine exclaimed, taking a long breath. "If Olive weren't so fearfully in love, she'd be suffocated."

Granet paused and looked before him with a puzzled frown.

"What in heaven's name is this?"

Exactly opposite to them was an erection of light

framework, obviously built around some hidden object for purposes of concealment. A Marine was standing on guard before it, with drawn cutlass. Granet was in the act of addressing him when an officer ran lightly down the fore part of the ship, and saluted.

"Very sorry, sir," he said, "but would you mind keeping to the other side? This deck is closed, for the present."

"What on earth have you got there?" Granet asked good-humouredly, — "that is if it's anything a landsman may know about?"

The young officer piloted them across to the other side.

"It's just a little something we are not permitted to talk about just now," he replied. "I didn't know the commander expected any visitors to-day or we should have had it roped off. Anything I can show you on this deck?" he inquired politely.

"Nothing at all, thanks," Geraldine assured him. "We'll just stroll about for a little time."

They leaned over the rail together. The young officer saluted and withdrew. A freshening breeze blew in their faces and the sunshine danced upon the foam-flecked sea. The harbour was lively with small craft, an aeroplane was circling overhead, and out in the Roads several warships were lying anchored.

"I was in luck this morning," Granet asserted.

"So were we," Geraldine replied. "I never enjoyed motoring more. Your new car is wonderful."

"She is a beauty, isn't she?" Granet assented enthusiastically. "What she could touch upon fourth

speed I wouldn't dare to say. We were going over sixty plenty of times this morning, and yet one scarcely noticed it. You see, she's so beautifully hung."

"You are fortunate," she remarked, "to have an appreciative uncle."

"He is rather a brick," Granet acknowledged. "He's done me awfully well all my life."

She nodded.

"You really are rather to be envied, aren't you, Captain Granet? You have most of the things a man wants. You've had your opportunity, too, of doing just the finest things a man can, and you've done them."

He looked gloomily out seawards.

"I am lucky in one way," he admitted. "In others I am not so sure."

She kept her head turned from him. Somehow or other, she divined quite well what was in his mind. She tried to think of something to say, something to dispel the seriousness which she felt to be in the atmosphere, but words failed her. It was he who broke the silence.

"May I ask you a question, Miss Conyers?"

"A question? Why not?"

"Are you really engaged to Major Thomson?"

She did not answer him at once. She still kept her eyes resolutely turned away from his. When at last she spoke, her voice was scarcely raised above a whisper.

"Certainly I am," she assented.

He leaned a little closer towards her. His voice

sounded to her very deep and firm. It was the voice of a man immensely in earnest.

"I am going to be an awful rotter," he said. "I suppose I ought to take your answer to my question as final. I won't, that's all. He came along first but that isn't everything. It's a fair fight between him and me. He hates me and takes no pains to hide it. He hates me because I care for you — you know that. I couldn't keep it to myself even if I would."

She drew a little away but he forced her to look at him. There was something else besides appeal in her eyes.

"You've been the victim of a mistake," he insisted, his hand resting upon hers. "I don't believe that you really care for him at all. He doesn't seem the right sort for you, he's so much older and graver. You mustn't be angry. You must forgive me, please, if I have said more than I ought — if I say more now — because I am going to tell you, now that we are alone together for a moment, that I love you."

She turned upon him a little indignantly, though the distress in her face was still apparent.

"Captain Granet!" she exclaimed. "You should not say that! You have no right — no right at all."

"On the contrary, I have every right," he answered doggedly. "It isn't as though Thomson were my friend. He hates me and I dislike him. Every man has a right to do his best to win the girl he cares for. It's the first time I've felt anything

of this sort. I've never wanted the big things before from any woman. And now — "

She turned impetuously away from him. Over their head an electric message was sparkling and crackling. She stood looking up, her hand outstretched as though to keep him away.

"I cannot listen any more," she declared. "If you say another word I shall go below."

He remained for a moment gloomily silent. A young officer stepped out of the wireless room and saluted Geraldine.

"Very sorry for you people, Miss Conyers," he announced, "but I am afraid we'll have to put you on shore. We've an urgent message here from the flag-ship to clear off all guests."

"But we haven't had lunch yet!" Geraldine protested.

Conyers suddenly made his appearance in the gangway, followed by Olive.

"What's the message, Howard?" he inquired.

The officer saluted and handed over a folded piece of paper. Conyers read it with a frown and stepped at once out on to the deck. He gave a few orders, then he turned back to his guests.

"Girls," he explained, "and you, Granet, I'm frightfully sorry but I can't keep you here another second. I have ordered the pinnace round. You must get on shore and have lunch at the 'Ship.' I'll come along as soon as I can. Frightfully sorry, Granet, but I needn't apologise to you, need I? War's war, you know, and this is a matter of urgency."

"You're not going out this tide?" Geraldine demanded breathlessly.

Conyers shook his head.

"It isn't that," he replied. "We've got some engineers coming over to do some work on deck, and I've had a private tip from my chief to clear out any guests I may have on board."

"Is it anything to do with this wonderful screened-up thing?" Olive asked, strolling towards the framework-covered edifice.

Conyers shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't disclose Government secrets! Between just us four — our friend Thomson isn't here, is he?" he added, smiling, — "we are planning a little Hell for the submarines."

They glanced curiously at the mysterious erection. Granet sighed.

"Secretive chaps, you sailors," he observed. "Never mind, I have a pal in the Admiralty who gives me a few hints now and then. I shall go and pump him."

"Don't you breathe a word about having been on board the 'Scorpion,'" Conyers begged quickly. "They wink at it down here, so long as it's done discreetly, but it's positively against the rules, you know."

"Righto!" Granet agreed. "There isn't a soul I'm likely to mention it to."

"I'll come over to the 'Ship' as soon as I can get away," Conyers promised.

They raced across the mile of broken water to the landing-stage. They were all a little silent. Olive

was frankly disappointed, Geraldine was busy with her thoughts. Granet's gaze seemed rivetted upon the "Scorpion." Another pinnace had drawn up alongside and a little company of men were boarding her.

"I only hope that they really have hit upon a device to rid the sea of these cursed submarines!" he remarked, as they made their way across the dock. "I see the brutes have taken to sinking fishing boats now."

"Ralph believes that they have got something," Olive declared eagerly. "He is simply aching to get to work."

"Sailors are all so jolly sanguine," Granet reminded her. "They are doing something pretty useful with nets, of course, in the way your brother was beginning to explain to me when Major Thomson chipped in, but they could only keep a fixed channel clear in that way. What they really need is some way of tackling them when they are under water. Here we are at last. I hope you girls are as hungry as I am."

They lunched in leisurely fashion, Olive in particular glancing often towards the door, and afterwards they sat about in the lounge, drinking their coffee. Granet had seemed to be in high spirits throughout the meal, and told the girls many little anecdotes of his adventures at the Front. Afterwards, however, he became silent, and finally, with a word of excuse, strolled off alone. Olive looked once more at the clock.

"Ralph doesn't seem to be coming back, does

he?" she sighed. "Let's walk a little way down to the landing-stage."

The two girls strolled out and made their way towards the harbour. They could see the "Scorpion" but there was no sign of any pinnace leaving her. Reluctantly they turned back towards the hotel.

"I wonder what has become of Captain Granet?" Olive asked.

Geraldine stopped short. There was a little frown gathering upon her forehead. She pointed up to the roof of the hotel, where a man was crouching with a telescope glued to his eyes. He lowered it almost as they paused, and waved his hand to them.

"Can't see any sign of Conyers," he shouted. "I'm waiting for the pinnace. Come up here. There's such a ripping view."

They entered the hotel in silence.

"I don't believe," Geraldine remarked uneasily, "that Ralph would like that."

They made their way to the top of the house and were escorted by a buxom chambermaid to what was practically a step-ladder opening out on to a skylight. From here they crawled on to the roof, where they found Granet comfortably ensconced with his back to a chimney, smoking a cigarette.

"This is rather one on your brother," he chuckled.

"Where did you find the telescope?" Geraldine asked.

"I borrowed it from downstairs," he answered. "Do come and have a look. You can see the 'Scor-

pion ' quite distinctly. All the officers seem to be gathered around that mysterious structure on the upper deck. I thought at first it was a stand for a gun but it isn't."

Olive held out her hand for the telescope but Geraldine shook her head. There was a troubled expression in her eyes.

" I suppose it's awfully silly, Captain Granet," she said, " but honestly, I don't think Ralph would take it as a joke at all if he knew that we were up here, trying to find out what was going on."

Olive set down the telescope promptly.

" I didn't think of that," she murmured.

Granet laughed easily.

" Perhaps you are right," he admitted. " All the same, we are a little exceptionally placed, aren't we? — his sister, his fiancée, and — "

He broke off suddenly. A hand had been laid upon his shoulder. A small, dark man, who had come round the corner of the chimney unperceived, was standing immediately behind him.

" I must trouble you all for your names and addresses, if you please," he announced quietly.

The two girls stared at him, dumbfounded. Granet, however, remained perfectly at his ease. He laid down the telescope and scrutinised the newcomer.

" I really don't altogether see," he remarked goodhumouredly, " why I should give my name and address to a perfect stranger, just because he asks for it."

The man opened his coat and displayed a badge.

"I am on Government service, sir."

"Well, I am Captain Granet, back from the Front with dispatches a few days ago," Granet told him. "This is Miss Conyers, sister of Commander Conyers of the 'Scorpion,' and Miss Olive Moreton, his fiancée. We are waiting for Commander Conyers at the present moment, and we were just looking to see if the pinnace had started. Is it against the law to use a telescope in Portsmouth?"

The man made a few notes in his pocket-book. Then he opened the trapdoor and stood on one side.

"No one is allowed out here, sir," he said. "The hotel people are to blame for not having the door locked. I shall have to make a report but I have no doubt that your explanation will be accepted. Will you be so good as to descend, please?"

Granet struggled to his feet and turned towards his companions.

"The fellow's quite right," he decided. "I am only glad that the Government are looking after things so. The Admiralty are much more go-ahead in this way than we are. I vote we have out the car and go down the front to Southsea — unless we are under arrest?" he added pleasantly, turning towards the man who had accosted them.

"You are at liberty to do whatever you please, sir," was the polite reply. "In any case, I think it would be quite useless of you to wait for Commander Conyers."

"Why?" Olive asked quickly.

"The 'Scorpion' has just received orders to leave on this evening's tide, madam," the man an-

nounced. "You can see that she is moving even now."

They looked out across the harbour. The smoke was pouring from the funnels of the destroyer. Already she had swung around and was steaming slowly towards the Channel.

"She's off, right enough!" Granet exclaimed. "Nothing left for us, then, but London."

CHAPTER XII

Geraldine, a few hours later, set down the telephone receiver with a little sigh of resignation. Lady Conyers glanced up inquiringly from her book.

"Was that some one wanting to come and see you at this time of night, Geraldine?" she asked.

Geraldine yawned.

"It's Hugh," she explained. "He has rung up from the War Office or somewhere — says he has just got back from France and wants to see me at once. I think he might have waited till to-morrow morning. I can scarcely keep my eyes open, I am so sleepy."

Lady Conyers glanced at the clock.

"It isn't really so late," she remarked, "and I dare say, if the poor man's been travelling all day, he'd like to say good-night to you."

Geraldine made a little grimace.

"I shall go into the morning room and wait for him," she announced. "He'll very likely find me asleep."

The Admiral looked up from behind the *Times*.

"Where's that nice young fellow Granet?" he asked. "Why didn't you bring him in to dinner?"

"Well, we didn't get back until nearly eight," Geraldine reminded her father. "I didn't think he'd have time to change and get back here comfortably."

"Fine young chap, that," Sir Seymour remarked. "The very best type of young English soldier. We could do with lots like him."

Geraldine left the room without remark. She could hear her father rustling his paper as she disappeared.

"Can't think why Geraldine didn't pick up with a smart young fellow like Granet instead of an old stick like Thomson," he grumbled. "I hate these Army Medicals, any way."

"Major Thomson has a charming disposition," Lady Conyers declared warmly. "Besides, he will be very well off some day — he may even get the baronetcy."

"Who cares about that?" her husband grunted. "Gerald has all the family she needs, and all the money. How she came to choose Thomson from all her sweethearts, I can't imagine.". . .

Geraldine, notwithstanding her fatigue, welcomed her lover very charmingly when he arrived, a few minutes later. Major Thomson was still in travelling clothes, and had the air of a man who had been working at high pressure for some time. He held her fingers tightly for a moment, without speaking. Then he led her to the sofa and seated himself beside her.

"Geraldine," he began gravely, "has what I say any weight with you at all?"

"A good deal," she assured him.

"You know that I do not like Captain Granet, yet you took him with you down to Portsmouth to-day and even allowed him to accompany you on board the 'Scorpion.'"

Geraldine started a little.

"How do you know that already?" she asked curiously.

He shook his head impatiently.

"It doesn't matter. I heard. Why did you do it, Geraldine?"

"In the first place, because he offered to motor us down after we had missed the train. There are heaps of other reasons."

"As, for instance?"

"Well, Olive and I preferred having an escort and Captain Granet was a most agreeable one. He took us down in a car his uncle has just given him — a sixty horse-power Panhard. I never enjoyed motoring more in my life."

"You are all very foolish," Thomson said slowly. "I am going to tell you something now, dear, which you may not believe, but it is for your good, and it is necessary for me to have some excuse for the request I am going to make. Granet is under suspicion at the War Office."

"Under suspicion?" Geraldine repeated blankly.

"Nothing has been proved against him," Thomson continued, "and I tell you frankly that in certain quarters the idea is scouted as absurd. On the other hand, he is under observation as being a possible German spy."

Geraldine for a moment sat quite still. Then she

broke into a peal of laughter. She sat up, a moment later, wiping her eyes.

"Are you really serious, Hugh?" she demanded.

"Absolutely," he assured her, a little coldly.

She wiped her eyes once more.

"Hugh, dear," she sighed, patting his hand, "you do so much better looking after your hospitals and your wounded than unearthing mare's-nests like this. I don't think that you'd be a brilliant success in the Intelligence Department. As to the War Office, well, you know what I think of them. Captain Granet a German spy, indeed!"

"Neither the War Office nor I myself," Thomson continued, "have arrived at these suspicions without some reason. Perhaps you will look at the matter a little more seriously when I tell you that Captain Granet will not be allowed to return to the Front."

"Not be allowed?" she repeated. "Hugh, you are not serious!"

"I have never been more serious in my life," he insisted. "I am not in a position to tell you more than the bare facts or I might disclose some evidence which even you would have to admit throws a rather peculiar light upon some of this young man's actions. As it is, however, I can do no more than warn you, and beg you," he went on, "to yield to my wishes in the matter of your further acquaintance with him."

There was a moment's rather curious silence. Geraldine seemed to be gazing through the walls of the room. Her hands were clenched in one another, her fingers nervously interlocked.

"I shall send for him to come and see me the first thing to-morrow morning," she decided.

"You will do nothing of the sort," Thomson objected firmly.

She turned her head and looked at him. He was conscious of the antagonism which had sprung up like a wall between them. His face, however, showed no sign.

"How do you propose to prevent me?" she asked, with ominous calm.

"By reminding you of your duty to your country," he answered. "Geraldine, dear, I did not expect to have to talk to you like this. When I tell you that responsible people in the War Office, officials whose profession it is to scent out treachery, have declared this young man suspect, I am certainly disappointed to find you embracing his cause so fervently. It is no personal matter. Believe me," he added, after a moment's pause, "whatever my personal bias may be, what I am saying to you now is not actuated in the slightest by any feelings of jealousy. I have told you what I know and it is for you to make your choice as to how much or how little in the future you will see of this young man. But I do forbid you, not in my own name but for our country's sake, to breathe a single word to him of what I have said to you."

"It comes to this, then," she said, "that you make accusations against a man and deny him the right of being heard?"

"If you choose to put it like that, yes," he assented. "Only I fancied that considering — consid-

ering the things between us, you might have taken my word."

He leaned a little towards her. If she had been looking she could scarcely have failed to have been touched by the sudden softness of his dark eyes, the little note of appeal in his usually immobile face. Her eyes, however, were fixed upon the diamond ring which sparkled upon her third finger. Slowly she drew it off and handed it to him.

"Hugh," she said, "the things you speak of do not exist any more between us. I am sorry, but I think you are narrow and suspicious. You have your own work to do. It seems to me mean to spend your time suspecting soldiers who have fought for their king and their country, of such a despicable crime."

"Can't you trust me a little more than that, Geraldine?" he asked wistfully.

"In what way?" she demanded. "I judge only by the facts, the things you have said to me, your accusations against Captain Granet. Why should you go out of your way to investigate cases of suspected espionage?"

"You cannot believe that I would do so unless I was convinced that it was my duty?"

"I cannot see that it is your business at all," she told him shortly.

He rose from his place.

"I am very sorry, Geraldine," he said. "I will keep this ring. You are quite free. But — look at me."

Against her will she was forced to do as he bade

her. Her own attitude, which had appeared to her so dignified and right, seemed suddenly weakened. She had the feeling of a peevish child.

"Geraldine," he begged, "take at least the advice of a man who loves you. Wait."

Even when he had opened the door she felt a sudden inclination to call him back. She heard him go down the hall, heard the front door open and close. She sat and looked in a dazed sort of way at the empty space upon her finger. Then she rose and went into the drawing-room, where her father and mother were still reading. She held out her hand.

"Mother," she announced, "I am not engaged to Major Thomson any more."

The Admiral laid down his newspaper.

"Damned good job, too!" he declared. "That young fellow Granet's worth a dozen of him. Never could stick an Army Medical. Well, well! How did he take it?"

Lady Conyers watched her daughter searchingly. Then she shook her head.

"I hope you have done wisely, dear," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

At a little after noon on the following day, Captain Granet descended from a taxicab in the courtyard of the Milan Hotel, and, passing through the swing doors, made his way to the inquiry office. A suave, black-coated young clerk hastened to the desk.

"Can you tell me," Granet inquired, "whether a gentleman named Guillot is staying here?"

The young man bowed.

"Monsieur Guillot arrived last night, sir," he announced. "He has just rung down to say that if a gentleman called to see him he could be shown up. Here, page," he went on, turning to a diminutive youth in the background, "show this gentleman to number 322."

Granet followed the boy to the lift and was conducted to a room on the third floor. The door was opened by a tall, white-haired Frenchman.

"Monsieur Guillot?" Captain Granet inquired pleasantly. "My name is Granet."

The Frenchman ushered him in. The door was closed and carefully locked. Then Monsieur Guillot swung around and looked at his visitor with some curiosity. Granet was still wearing his uniform.

"France must live," Granet murmured.

The Frenchman at once extended his hand.

"My friend," he confessed, "for a moment I was surprised. It did not occur to me to see you in this guise."

Granet smiled.

"I have been out at the Front," he explained, "and am home wounded."

"But an English officer?" Monsieur Guillot remarked dubiously. "I do not quite understand, then. The nature of the communication which I have come to receive is known to you?"

Granet nodded and accepted the chair which his host had offered.

"I do not think that you should be so much surprised," he said simply. "If the war is grievous for your country, it is ruin to mine. We do not, perhaps, advertise our apprehensions in the papers. We prefer to keep them locked up in our own brain. There is one great fact always before us. Germany is unconquerable. One must find peace or perish."

Monsieur Guillot listened with a curious look upon his face. His forefinger tapped the copy of the *Times* which was lying upon the table. The other nodded gravely.

"Yes," he continued, "I know that our Press is carrying on a magnificent campaign of bluff. I know that many of the ignorant people of the country believe that this war is still being prosecuted with every hope of success. We who have been to the Front, especially those who have any source of information in Germany, know differently. The longer the war, the more ruinous the burden which your country and mine will have to bear."

"It is my opinion also," Monsieur Guillot declared, "and furthermore, listen. It is not our war at all, that is the cruel part of it. It is Russia's war and yours. Yet it is we who suffer most, we, the richest part of whose country is in the hands of the foe, we whose industries are paralysed, my country from whom the life-blood is being slowly drained. You English, what do you know of the war? No enemy has set foot upon your soil, no Englishman has seen his womankind dishonoured or his home crumble into ashes. The war to you is a thing of paper, an abstraction — that same war which has turned the better half of my beloved country into a lurid corner of hell."

"Our time has not yet come," Granet admitted, "but before long, unless diplomacy can avert it, fate will be knocking at our doors, too. Listen. You have friends still in power, Monsieur Guillot? — friends in the Cabinet, is it not so?"

"It is indeed true," Monsieur Guillot assented.

"You have, too," Granet continued, "a great following throughout France. You are the man for the task I bring to you. You, if you choose, shall save your country and earn the reward she will surely bestow upon you."

Monsieur Guillot's cheeks were flushed a little. With long, nervous fingers he rolled a cigarette and lit it.

"Monsieur," he said, "I listen to you eagerly, and yet I am puzzled. You wear the uniform of an English officer, but you come to me, is it not so, as an emissary of Germany?"

"In bald words that may be true," Granet confessed, "yet I would remind you of two things. First, that the more dominant part of the personality which I have inherited comes to me from Alsatian ancestors; and secondly, that this peace for which I am striving may in the end mean salvation for England, too."

"I hear you with relief," Monsieur Guillot admitted. "In this transaction it is my great desire to deal with a man of honour. As such I now perceive that I can recognise you, monsieur."

Granet bowed gravely and without any shadow of embarrassment.

"That assuredly, Monsieur Guillot," he said. "Shall I proceed?"

"By all means."

Granet drew a thin packet from the breast pocket of his coat. He laid it on the table between them.

"I received this," he announced, "less than three weeks ago from the hands of the Kaiser himself."

Monsieur Guillot gazed at his companion incredulously.

"It was very simple," Granet continued. "I was taken prisoner near the village of Ossray. I was conducted at once to headquarters and taken by motor-car to a certain fortified place which I will not specify, but which was at that time the headquarters of the German Staff. I received this document there in the way I have told you. I was then assisted, after some very remarkable adventures, to rejoin my regiment. You can open that document, Monsieur Guillot. It is addressed to you. Guard it carefully,

though, for it is signed by the Kaiser himself. I have carried it with me now for more than a fortnight in the inner sole of my shoe. As you can imagine, its discovery upon my person would have meant instant death."

Monsieur Guillot was engrossed in reading the few lines of the missive. When he had finished, he covered the paper with the palm of his hand and leaned forward. There was a queer light in his eyes.

"Germany will give up Alsace and Lorraine," he said hoarsely, "and will retire within her own frontiers. She will ask for no indemnity. What is the meaning of it?"

"Simple enough," Granet pointed out. "A great politician like you should easily realise the actual conditions which prompt such an offer. What good is territory to Germany, territory over which she must rule by force, struggling always against the accumulated hatred of years? Alsace and Lorraine have taught her her lesson. It is not French territory she wants. Russia has far more to give. Russia and England between them can pay an indemnity which will make Germany rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Form your party, Monsieur Guillot, spread your tidings in any way that seems fit to you, only until the hour comes, guard that document as you would your soul. Its possession would mean death to you as it would to me."

Monsieur Guillot took the document and buttoned it up in his inside pocket.

"Supposing I succeed," he said quietly, "what of your country then?"

"My country will make peace," Granet replied. "It will be a peace that will cost us much, but nothing more than we deserve. For generations this war has been the perfectly obvious and apparent sequence of European events. It threw its warning shadow across our path for years, and our statesmen deliberately turned their heads the other way or walked blindfolded. Not only our statesmen, mind, but our people, our English people. Our young men shirked their duty, our philosophers and essayists shirked theirs. We prated of peace and conventions, and we knew very well that we were living in times when human nature and red blood were still the controlling elements. We watched Germany arm and prepare. We turned for comfort towards our fellow sinners, America, and we prattled about conventions and arbitration, and a hundred other silly abstractions. A father can watch the punishment of his child, Monsieur Guillot. Believe me, there are many other Englishmen besides me who will feel a melancholy satisfaction in the chastisement of their country, many who are more English, even, than I."

Monsieur Guillot passed away from the personal side of the matter. Already his mind was travelling swiftly along the avenues of his own future greatness.

"This is the chance which comes to few men," he muttered. "There is Déjane, Gardine, Débonnot, Senn, besides my own followers. My own journal, too! It is a great campaign, this, which I shall start."

Granet rose to his feet.

"After to-day I breathe more freely," he confessed. "There have been enemies pressing closely around me, I have walked in fear. To-day I am a free man. Take care, monsieur. Take care especially whilst you are in England."

Monsieur Guillot extended his hand.

"My young friend," he said, "in the years to come you and I shall perhaps meet in our wonderful Paris, and if I may not tell the world so, I shall yet feel, as we look upon her greatness, that you and I together have saved France. Adieu!"

Granet made his way along the empty corridor, rang for the lift and descended into the hall. A smile was upon his lips. The torch at last was kindled! In the hall of the hotel he came across a group of assembling guests just starting for the luncheon room. A tall, familiar figure stepped for a moment on one side. His heart gave a little jump. Geraldine held out her pearl-gloved hand.

"Captain Granet," she said, "I wanted to tell you something."

"Yes?" he answered breathlessly.

She glanced towards where the little group of people were already on their way to the stairs.

"I must not stay for a second," she continued, dropping her voice, "but I wanted to tell you — I am no longer engaged to Major Thomson. Goodbye!"

A rush of words trembled upon his lips but she was gone. He watched her slim, graceful figure as she passed swiftly along the vestibule and joined her friends. He even heard her little laugh as

she greeted one of the men who had waited for her.

"Decidedly," Granet said to himself triumphantly as he turned towards the door, "this is my day!"

CHAPTER XIV

Monsieur Guillot was a man of emotional temperament. For more than an hour after Granet had left him, he paced up and down his little room, stood before the high windows which overlooked the Thames, raised his hands above his head and gazed with flashing eyes into the future — such a future! All his life he had been a schemer, his eyes turned towards the big things, yet with himself always occupying the one glorified place in the centre of the arena. He was, in one sense of the word, a patriot, but it was the meanest and smallest sense. There was no great France for him in which his was not the commanding figure. In every dream of that wonderful future, of a more splendid and triumphant France, he saw himself on the pinnacle of fame, himself acclaimed by millions the strong, great man, the liberator. France outside himself lived only as a phantasy. And now at last his chance had come. The minutes passed unnoticed as he built his way up into the future. He was shrewd and calculating, he took note of the pitfalls he must avoid. One by one he decided upon the men whom gradually and cautiously he would draw into his confidence. Finally he saw the whole scheme complete, the bomb-shell thrown, France hysterically casting laurels upon the man who had brought her unexpected peace.

The door-bell rang. He answered it a little im-

patiently. A slim, fashionably dressed young Frenchman stood there, whose face was vaguely familiar to him.

"Monsieur Guillot?" the newcomer inquired politely.

Guillot bowed. The young man handed him a card.

"I am the Baron D'Evignon," he announced, "second secretary at the Embassy here."

Monsieur Guillot held the card and looked at his visitor. He was very puzzled. Some dim sense of foreboding was beginning to steal in upon him.

"Be so kind as to come in, Monsieur le Baron," he invited. "Will you not be seated and explain to me to what I am indebted for this honour? You do not, by any chance, mistake me for another? I am Monsieur Guillot, lately, alas! of Lille."

The Baron smiled ever so slightly as he waved away the chair.

"There is no mistake, Monsieur Guillot," he said. "I come to you with a message from my Chief. He would be greatly honoured if you would accompany me to the Embassy. He wishes a few minutes' conversation with you."

"With me?" Monsieur Guillot echoed incredulously. "But there is some mistake."

"No mistake, I assure you," the young man insisted.

Monsieur Guillot drew a little back into the room.

"But what have I to do with the Ambassador, or with diplomatic matters of any sort?" he protested. "I am here on business, to see what can be saved

from the wreck of my affairs. Monsieur the Ambassador is mistaking me for another."

The Baron shook his head.

"There is no mistake, my dear sir," he insisted. "We all recognise," he added, with a bow, "the necessities which force the most famous of us to live sometimes in the shadow of anonymity. If the Chief could find little to say to Monsieur Guillot of Lille, he will, I am sure, be very interested in a short conversation with Monsieur Henri Pailleton."

There was a brief, tense silence. The man who had called himself Guillot was transformed. The dreams which had uplifted him a few minutes ago, had passed. He was living very much in the present — an ugly and foreboding present. The veins stood out upon his forehead and upon the back of his hands, his teeth gleamed underneath his coarse, white moustache. Then he recovered himself.

"There is some mistake," he said, "but I will come."

In silence they left the hotel and drove to the Embassy, in silence the young man ushered his charge into the large, pleasant apartment on the ground-floor of the Embassy, where the ambassador was giving instructions to two of his secretaries. He dismissed them with a little wave of his hand and bowed politely to his visitor. There was no longer any pretext on the part of Monsieur Guillot. He recognised its complete futility.

"Monsieur Pailleton," the ambassador began, "will you take a seat? It is very kind of you to obey so quickly my summons."

"I had no idea," the latter remarked, "that my presence in England was known. I am here on private business."

The ambassador bowed suavely.

"Precisely, my friend! You see, I use the epithet 'my friend' because at a time like this all Frenchmen must forget their differences and work together for the good and the honour of their country. Is it not so, monsieur?"

"That is indeed true," Monsieur Pailleton admitted slowly. "We may work in different ways but we work towards the same end."

"No one has ever doubted your patriotism, Monsieur Pailleton," the ambassador continued. "It is my privilege now to put it to the test. There is a little misunderstanding in Brazil, every particular concerning which, and the views of our Government, is contained in the little parcel of documents which you see upon this table. Put them in your pocket, Monsieur Pailleton. I am going to ask you to serve your country by leaving for Liverpool this afternoon and for Brazil to-morrow on the steamship 'Hermes.'"

Monsieur Pailleton had been a little taken aback by the visit of the Baron. He sat now like a man temporarily stupefied. He was too amazed to find any sinister significance in this mission. He could only gasp. The ambassador's voice, as he continued talking smoothly, seemed to reach him from a long way off.

"It may be a little contrary to your wishes, my friend," the latter proceeded, "to find yourself so

far from the throb of our great struggle, yet in these days we serve best who obey. It is the wish of those who stand for France that you should take that packet and board that steamer."

Monsieur Pailleton began in some measure to recover himself. He was still, however, bewildered.

"Monsieur," he protested, "I do not understand. This mission to Brazil of which you speak — it can have no great importance. Cannot it be entrusted to some other messenger?"

"Alas! no, my dear sir," was the uncompromising reply. "It is you — Monsieur Pailleton — whom the President desires to travel to Brazil."

The light was breaking in upon Pailleton. He clenched his fists.

"I am to be got out of the way!" he exclaimed. "The President fears me politically, he fears my following!"

The ambassador drew himself a little more upright, a stiff, unbending figure. His words seemed suddenly to become charged with more weight.

"Monsieur Pailleton," he said, "the only thing that France fears is treachery!"

Pailleton gripped at the back of his chair. The room for a moment swam before his eyes.

"Is this an insult, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur?" he demanded.

"Take it as an insult if in your heart there is no shadow of treachery towards the France that is to-day, towards the cause of the Allies as it is to-day," was the stern answer.

"I refuse to accept this extraordinary mission,"

Pailleton declared, rising to his feet. "You can send whom you will to Brazil. I have greater affairs before me."

The ambassador shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall not press you," he said. "I shall only put before you the alternative. You are at this present moment upon French soil. If you refuse this mission which has been offered to you, I shall detain you here until I have the means of sending you under escort to France."

"Detain me? On what charge?" Pailleton exclaimed angrily.

"On the charge of treason," was the quiet reply. "I shall have you stripped and searched in this room. I shall have your luggage and your room searched at the Milan Hotel. And now, Monsieur Pailleton?"

Once more the man was bewildered. This time, however, it was bewilderment of a different sort. He thought for a moment steadfastly. Who was there who could have betrayed him?

"What is the nature of this document, monsieur, which you expect to find amongst my belongings?" he demanded.

"An authorised offer of peace from Germany to the French people," the ambassador answered slowly. "It is the second attempt which has been made. The first was torn into fragments before the face of the person who had the effrontery to present it. The second, Monsieur Pailleton, is in your possession. You may keep it if you will. In Brazil you will find it of little use."

Monsieur Pailleton folded his arms.

"I am a Frenchman," he proclaimed. "What I may do, I do for France."

"You refuse my mission, then?"

"I refuse it."

The ambassador struck a bell upon his table. One of his secretaries promptly appeared.

"Send Colonel Défarge to me at once," his chief ordered.

There was a brief pause. The ambassador was busy writing at his table. Pailleton, who was breathing heavily, said nothing. Presently an officer in French uniform entered.

"Monsieur le Colonel," the ambassador said, stretching out his hand towards Pailleton, "you will accept the charge of this man, whom you will consider under arrest. I take the full responsibility for this proceeding. You will conduct him to your rooms here and you will search him. Any document found in his possession you will bring to me. When you have finished, let me know, and I will give you an authority to proceed to his apartments in the Milan Hotel. You understand?"

"Certainly, my chief."

The officer saluted and moved toward Pailleton.

"You will come quietly, monsieur, is it not so?" he asked.

Pailleton waved him away. He turned to the ambassador.

"Monsieur," he decided, "I will go to Brazil."

CHAPTER XV

TWO MORE GERMAN SUBMARINES SUNK WITH ALL HANDS

The Admiralty report that they received last night a message from Commander Conyers of the destroyer "Scorpion," announcing that he has destroyed German submarines U 22 and 27, with all hands.

"Well, I'm damned!" the Admiral exclaimed, as he laid down the newspaper a few mornings later. "Ralph's done it this time, and no mistake."

Geraldine looked over his shoulder, her cheeks aglow.

"I knew at seven o'clock," she declared. "Harris brought me the paper up. They are all so excited about it in the kitchen. You'd just gone out in the Park."

"I want to know how it was done," the Admiral speculated. "Can't have been ramming if he bagged two of them, and they surely never came to the surface voluntarily, with a destroyer about."

Geraldine glanced around the room to be sure that they were alone.

"Don't you remember when Olive and I were at Portsmouth?" she said. "Ralph has been absolutely dumb about it but he did just give us a hint that he had a little surprise in store for the sub-

marines. There was something on deck, covered all up and watched by a sentry, and just before we sat down to lunch, you know, we were turned off and had to go to the 'Ship.' Ralph wouldn't tell us a word about it but I'm sure he's got some new contrivance on the 'Scorpion' for fighting the submarines."

"There may be something in it," the Admiral admitted cheerfully. "I noticed the *Morning Post* naval man the other day made a very guarded reference to some secret means of dealing with these vermin."

Lady Conyers sailed into the room, a telegram in her hand.

"A wireless from Ralph," she announced. "Listen."

Have sunk two of the brutes. More to come. Love.
RALPH.

They pored over the telegram and the newspaper until the breakfast was cold. The Admiral was like a boy again.

"If we can get rid of these curses of the sea," he said, settling down at last to his bacon and eggs, "and get those Germans to come out, the war will be over months before any one expected. I shall go down to the Admiralty after breakfast and see if they've anything to tell. Ralph gave me a hint about the net scheme but he never even mentioned anything else."

The telephone rang in the next room and a servant summoned Geraldine.

"Captain Granet wishes to speak to Miss Conyers," he announced.

Geraldine left her place at once and hastened into the library. She took up the receiver.

"Is that you, Captain Granet?" she asked.

"I felt that I must ring you up," he declared, "to congratulate you, Miss Conyers, upon your brother's exploit. I have had half a dozen soldier fellows in already this morning to talk about it, and we're simply mad with curiosity. Do you think we shall be told soon how it was done?"

"Father's going down to the Admiralty to try and find out," Geraldine replied. "Ralph doesn't say a word except that he sunk them. We've had a wireless from him this morning."

"It really doesn't matter much, does it," Granet went on, "so long as we get rid of the brutes. I was perfectly certain, when we were down at Portsmouth, that your brother had something up his sleeve. Does give one a thrill, doesn't it, when one's ashore and doing nothing, to read of things like this?"

"You'll soon be at work again," she told him encouragingly.

"I don't know," he sighed. "They talk about giving me a home job and I don't think I could stick it. Are you walking in the Park this morning, Miss Conyers?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"No, I am playing golf at Ranelagh."

"Might I call this afternoon?"

"If you like," she assented. "After four o'clock, though, because I am staying out to lunch."

"Thank you so much," he replied gratefully.

She set down the receiver again and went back to the breakfast-room.

"Captain Granet just wanted to congratulate us all," she announced, "and to know if he could come in to tea this afternoon."

"Better ask him to dinner, my dear," the Admiral suggested hospitably. "He's a fine young fellow, Granet. Very thoughtful of him to ring us up."

Lady Conyers made no comment. Geraldine was bending over her plate. The Admiral rose to his feet. He was much too excited to pursue the conversation.

"I shall walk down to the Admiralty and see if I can get hold of old Wilcock," he continued. "If he won't tell me anything, I'll wring the old beggar's neck."

The Admiral left the house a few minutes later and Lady Conyers walked arm in arm with her daughter into the pleasant little morning-room which looked out upon the Square. The former paused for a moment to look at Thomson's photograph, which stood upon one of the side tables. Then she closed the door.

"Geraldine," she said, "I am not very happy about you and Hugh."

"Why not, mother?" the girl asked, looking out of the window.

"Perhaps because I like Hugh," Lady Conyers went on quietly, "perhaps, too, because I am not sure that you have done wisely. You haven't given me any reason yet, have you, for breaking your engagement?"

Geraldine was silent for a moment. Then she came back and sat on the rug at her mother's feet. She kept her face, however, a little turned away.

"It's so hard to put it into words, mother," she said thoughtfully, "only Hugh never seemed to give me any of his confidence. Of course, his is very dull work, looking after hospitals and that sort of thing, but still, I'd have liked to try and take an interest in it. He must have seen exciting things in France, but it is only by the merest chance that one ever realises that he has been even near the Front. He is so silent, so secretive."

Lady Conyers took up her knitting.

"Some men are like that, dear," she remarked. "It is just temperamental. Perhaps you haven't encouraged him to talk."

"But I have," Geraldine insisted. "I have asked him no end of questions, but before he has answered any of them properly, I find him trying to change the conversation."

"Men don't like talking about the war, you know," Lady Conyers went on. "There was that nice Major Tyndale who was back from the Front the other day with a V. C. and goodness knows what. Not a word would he say about any one of the fights, and he is cheery enough in a general way, isn't he, and fond of talking?"

"Even then," Geraldine protested, "Hugh's work is different. I can understand why he doesn't like to talk a lot about the wounded and that sort of thing, but he must have had some interesting adventures."

"I don't think," Lady Conyers said, "the very nicest men talk about their adventures."

Geraldine made a little grimace.

"Hugh doesn't talk about anything," she complained. "He goes about looking as though he had the cares of the world upon his shoulders, and then he has the — well, the cheek, I call it, to lecture me about Captain Granet. He does talk about Captain Granet in the most absurd manner, you know, mother."

"He may have his reasons," Lady Conyers observed.

Geraldine turned her head and looked at her mother.

"Now what reasons could he have for not liking Captain Granet and suspecting him of all manner of ridiculous things?" she asked. "Did you ever know a more harmless, ingenucus, delightful young man in your life?"

"Perhaps it is because you find him all these things," Lady Conyers suggested, "that Hugh doesn't like him."

"Of course, if he is going to be jealous about nothing at all — "

"Is it nothing at all?"

Lady Conyers raised her head from her knitting and looked across at her daughter. A little flush of colour had suddenly streamed into Geraldine's face. She drew back as though she had been sitting too near the fire.

"Of course it is," she declared. "I have only known Captain Granet for a very short time. I

like him, of course — every one must like him who knows him — but that's all."

"Do you know," Lady Conyers said, a moment later, "I almost hope that it is all."

"And why, mother?"

"Because I consider Hugh is a great judge of character. Because we have known Hugh since he was a boy, and we have known Captain Granet for about a week."

Geraldine rose to her feet.

"You don't like Captain Granet, mother."

"I do not dislike him," Lady Conyers replied thoughtfully. "I do not see how any one could."

"Hugh does. He hinted things about him — that he wasn't honest — and then forbade me to tell him. I think Hugh was mean."

Lady Conyers glanced at the clock.

"You had better go and get ready, dear, if you have promised to be at Ranelagh at half-past ten," she said. "Will you just remember this?"

"I'll remember anything you say, mother," Geraldine promised.

"You're just a little impulsive, dear, at times, although you seem so thoughtful," Lady Conyers continued. "Don't rush at any conclusion about these two men. Sometimes I have fancied that there is a great well of feeling behind Hugh's silence. And more than that — that there is something in his life of which just now he cannot speak, which is keeping him living in great places. His abstractions are not ordinary ones, you know. It's just an idea of mine, but the other day — well, something happened which

I thought rather queer. I saw a closed car turn into St. James's Park and, evidently according to orders, the chauffeur drove very slowly. There were two men inside, talking very earnestly. One of them was Hugh; the other was — well, the most important man at the War Office, who seldom, as you know, speaks to any one."

"You mean to say that he was alone, talking confidentially with Hugh?" Geraldine exclaimed incredulously.

"He was, dear," her mother assented, "and it made me think. That's all. I have a fancy that some day when the time comes that Hugh is free to talk, he will be able to interest you — well, quite as much as Captain Granet. . . . Now then, dear, hurry. There's the car at the door for you and you haven't your hat on."

Geraldine went upstairs a little thoughtfully. As she drew on her gloves, she looked down at the empty space upon her third finger. For a moment there was almost a lump in her throat.

CHAPTER XVI

The two men who had walked up together arm in arm from Downing Street, stood for several moments in Pall Mall before separating. The pressman who was passing yearned for the sunlight in his camera. One of the greatest financiers of the city in close confabulation with Mr. Gordon Jones, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was an interesting, almost an historical sight.

"It is a source of the greatest satisfaction to me, Sir Alfred," the Minister was saying earnestly, "to find such royal and whole-hearted support in the city. I am afraid," he went on, with a little twinkle in his eyes, "that there are times when I have scarcely been popular in financial circles."

"We have hated you like poison," the other assured him, with emphasis.

"The capitalists must always hate the man who tries to make wealth pay its just share in the support of the Empire," Mr. Gordon Jones remarked. "The more one has, the less one likes to part with it. However, those days have passed. You bankers have made my task easier at every turn. You have met me in every possible way. To you personally, Sir Alfred, I feel that some day I shall have to express my thanks — my thanks and the thanks of the nation — in a more tangible form."

"You are very kind," the banker acknowledged. "Times like this change everything. We remember only that we are Englishmen."

The Minister hailed a passing taxi and disappeared. The banker strolled slowly along Pall Mall and passed through the portals of an august-looking club. The hall-porter relieved him of his coat and hat with great deference. As he was crossing the hall, after having exchanged greetings with several friends, he came face to face with Surgeon-Major Thomson. The latter paused.

"I am afraid you don't remember me, Sir Alfred," he said, "but I have been hoping for an opportunity of thanking you personally for the six ambulance cars you have endowed. I am Surgeon-Major Thomson, chief inspector of Field Hospitals."

Sir Alfred held out his hand affably.

"I remember you perfectly, Major," he declared. "I am very glad that my gift is acceptable. Anything one can do to lessen the suffering of those who are fighting our battle, is almost a charge upon our means."

"It is very fortunate for us that you feel like that," the other replied. "Thank you once more, sir."

The two men separated. Sir Alfred turned to the hall-porter.

"I am expecting my nephew in to dine," he said, — "Captain Granet. Bring him into the smoking-room, will you, directly he arrives."

"Certainly, sir!"

Sir Alfred passed on across the marble hall.

Thomson, whose hand had been upon his hat, replaced it upon the peg. He looked after the great banker and stood for a moment deep in thought. Then he addressed the hall-porter.

"By-the-bye, Charles," he inquired, "if you ask a non-member to dinner, you have to dine in the strangers' room, I suppose?"

"Certainly, sir," the man replied. "It is just at the back of the general dining-room."

"I suppose an ordinary member couldn't dine in there alone?"

"It is not customary, sir."

Surgeon-Major Thomson made his way to the telephone booth. When he emerged, he interviewed the head-waiter.

"Keep a small table for me in the strangers' room," he ordered. "I shall require dinner for two."

"At what time, sir?"

Major Thomson seemed for a moment deaf. He was looking through the open door of the smoking-room to where Sir Alfred was deep in the pages of a review.

"Are there many people dining there to-night?" he asked.

"Sir Alfred has a guest at eight o'clock, sir," the man replied. "There are several others, I think, but they have not ordered tables specially."

"At a quarter past eight, if you please. I shall be in the billiard-room, Charles," he added, turning to the hall-porter.

Sir Alfred wearied soon of the pages of his review

and leaned back in his chair, his hands folded in front of him, gazing through the window at the opposite side of the way. A good many people, passing backwards and forwards, glanced at him curiously. For thirty years his had been something like a household name in the city. He had been responsible, he and the great firm of which he was the head, for international finance conducted on the soundest principles, finance which scorned speculation, finance which rolled before it the great snowball of automatically accumulated wealth. His father had been given the baronetcy which he now enjoyed, and which, as he knew very well, might at any moment be transferred into a peerage. He was a short, rather thick-set man, with firm jaws and keen blue eyes, carefully dressed in somewhat old-fashioned style, with horn-rimmed eyeglass hung about his neck with a black ribbon. His hair was a little close-cropped and stubbly. No one could have called him handsome, no one could have found him undistinguished. Even without the knowledge of his millions, people who glanced at him recognised the atmosphere of power.

"Wonder what old Anselman's thinking about," one man asked another in an opposite corner.

"Money bags," was the prompt reply. "The man thinks money, he dreams money, he lives money. He lives like a prince but he has no pleasures. From ten in the morning till two, he sits in his office in Lombard Street, and the pulse of the city beats differently in his absence."

"I wonder!" the other murmured.

Other people had wondered, too. Still the keen blue eyes looked across through the misty atmosphere at the grey building opposite. Men and women passed before him in a constant, unseen procession. No one came and spoke to him, no one interfered with his meditations. The two men who had been discussing him passed out of the room presently. One of them glanced backwards in his direction.

"After all, I suppose," he observed, as he passed down the hall, "there is something great about wealth or else one wouldn't believe that old Anselman there was thinking of his money-bags. Why, here's Granet. Good fellow! I'd no idea you'd joined this august company of old fogies."

Granet smiled as he shook hands.

"I haven't," he explained. "You have to be a millionaire, don't you, and a great political bug, before they'd let you in? No place for poor soldiers! I have to be content with the Rag."

"Poor devil!" his friend remarked sympathetically, — "best cooking, best wines in London. These Service men look after themselves all right. What are you doing here, anyhow, Granet?"

"I'm dining with my uncle," Granet replied, quickly.

"Sir Alfred's in there, waiting for you," his friend told him, indicating the door, — "he has been sitting at the window watching for you, in fact. So long!"

The two men passed out and Granet was ushered into the smoking-room. Sir Alfred came back from

his reverie and greeted his nephew cordially. The two men sat by the window for a few moments in silence.

"An apéritif?" Sir Alfred suggested. "Capital!"

They drank mixed vermouth. Sir Alfred picked up an evening paper from his side.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Nothing fresh," Granet replied. "The whole world's excited about this submarine affair. Looks as though we'd got the measure of those Johnnies, doesn't it?"

"It does indeed," Sir Alfred agreed. "Two submarines, one after the other, two of the latest class, too, destroyed within a few miles and without a word of explanation. No wonder every one's excited about it!"

"They're fearfully bucked at the Admiralty, I believe," Granet remarked. "Of course, they'll pretend that they had this new dodge or whatever it may be, up their sleeves all the time."

Sir Alfred nodded.

"Well," he said, "come in to dinner, young fellow. You shall entertain me with tales of your adventures whilst you compare our cuisine here with your own commissariat."

They passed on into the strangers' dining-room, a small but cheerful apartment opening out of the general dining-room. The head-waiter ushered them unctuously to a small table set in the far corner of the room.

"I have obeyed your wishes, Sir Alfred," he an-

nounced, as they seated themselves. "No one else will be dining anywhere near you."

Sir Alfred nodded.

"Knowing how modest you soldiers are in talking of your exploits," he remarked to Granet, "I have pleaded for seclusion. Here, in the intervals of our being served with dinner, you can spin me yarns of the Front. The whole thing fascinates me. I want to hear the story of your escape."

They seated themselves, and Sir Alfred studied the menu for a moment through his eyeglass. After the service of the soup they were alone. He leaned a little across the table.

"Ronnie," he said, "I thought it was better to ask you here than to have you down at the city."

Granet nodded.

"This seems all right," he admitted, glancing around. "Well, one part of the great work is finished. I have lived for eleven days not quite sure when I wasn't going to be stood up with my back to the light at the Tower. Now it's over."

"You've seen Pailleton?"

"Seen him, impressed him, given him the document. He has his plans all made."

"Good! Very good!"

Sir Alfred ate soup for several moments as though it were the best soup on earth and nothing else was worth consideration. Then he laid down his spoon.

"Magnificent!" he said. "Now listen — these submarines. There was a Taube close at hand and I can tell you something which the Admiralty here

are keeping dark, with their tongues in their cheeks. Both those submarines were sunk under water."

"I guessed it," Granet replied coolly. "I not only guessed it but I came very near the key of the whole thing."

A waiter appeared with the next course, followed by the wine steward, carrying champagne. Sir Alfred nodded approvingly.

"Just four minutes in the ice," he instructed, "not longer. What you tell me about the champagne country is, I must confess, a relief," he added, turning to Granet. "It may not affect us quite so much, but personally I believe that the whole world is happier and better when champagne is cheap. It is the bottled gaiety of the nation. A nation of ginger ale drinkers would be doomed before they reached the second generation. 1900 Pommery, this, Ronnie, and I drink your health. If I may be allowed one moment's sentiment," he added, raising his glass, "let me say that I drink your health from the bottom of my heart, with all the admiration which a man of my age feels for you younger fellows who are fighting for us and for our country."

They drank the toast in silence. In a moment or two they were alone again.

"Go on, Ronnie," his uncle said. "I am interested."

"I met Conyers the other day," Granet proceeded, "the man who commands the 'Scorpion.' I managed to get an invitation down to Portsmouth to have lunch with him on his ship. I went down with his sister and the young lady he is engaged to marry.

On deck there was a structure of some sort covered up. I tried to make inquiries about it but they headed me off pretty quick. There was even a sentry standing on guard before it — wouldn't let me even feel the shape of it. However, I hadn't given up hope when there came a wireless — no guests to be allowed on board. Conyers had to pack us all off back to the hotel, without stopping even for lunch. From the hotel I got a telescope and I saw a pinnace with half-a-dozen workmen, and a pilot who was evidently an engineer, land on board. They seemed to be completing the adjustments of some new piece of mechanism. Then they steamed away out of sight of the land."

"A busy life, yours, Ronnie," Sir Alfred remarked, after a moment's pause. "What about it now? I've had two urgent messages from Berlin this morning."

"It's pretty difficult," Granet acknowledged. "The 'Scorpion''s out in the Channel or the North Sea. No getting at her. And I don't believe there's another destroyer yet fitted with this apparatus, whatever it may be."

"They must be making them somewhere, though," Sir Alfred remarked.

His nephew nodded.

"To think," he muttered, "that we've two hundred men spread out at Tyneside, Woolwich and Portsmouth, and not one of them got on to this! A nation of spies, indeed! They're mugs, uncle."

"Not altogether that," the banker replied. "We have some reports, although they don't go far

enough. I can put you on to the track of the thing. The apparatus you saw is something in the nature of an inverted telescope, with various extraordinary lenses treated by a new process. You can see forty feet down under the surface of the water for a distance of a mile, and we believe that attached to the same apparatus is an instrument which brings any moving object within the range of what they call a deep-water gun."

"Did that come from reports?" Granet asked eagerly.

"It did," Sir Alfred said. "Further than that, the main part of the instrument is being made under the supervision of Sir Meyville Worth, in a large workshop erected on his estate in a village near Brancaster in Norfolk."

"I take it back," Granet remarked.

"The plans of the instrument would be worth a hundred thousand pounds," Sir Alfred continued calmly. "If that is impossible, the destruction of the little plant would be the next consideration."

"Do I come in here?" Granet inquired.

"You do, Ronnie," his uncle replied. "The name of the village where Sir Meyville Worth lives is Market Burnham, which, as I think I told you, is within a few miles of Brancaster. Geoffrey, at my instigation, has arranged a harmless little golf party to go to Brancaster the day after to-morrow. You will accompany them. In the meantime, Miss Worth, Sir Meyville Worth's only daughter, is staying in London until Wednesday. She is lunching with your aunt at the Ritz to-morrow. I have made some other

arrangements in connection with your visit to Norfolk, which will keep for the present. I see that some strangers have entered the room. Tell me exactly how you came by the wound in your foot?"

Granet turned a little around. There was a queer change in his face as he looked back at his uncle.

"Do you know the man at that corner table?" he asked.

Sir Alfred glanced across the room.

"Very slightly. I spoke to him an hour ago. He thanked me for some ambulances. He is the chief inspector of hospitals, I think — Major Thomson, his name is."

"Did you happen to say that I was dining with you?"

Sir Alfred reflected for a moment.

"I believe that I did mention it," he admitted. "Why?"

Granet struggled for a moment with an idea and rejected it. He drained his glass and leaned across the table.

"He's a dull enough person really," he remarked, a little under his breath, "but I seem to be always running up against him. Once or twice he's given me rather a start."

Sir Alfred smiled. He called the wine steward and pointed to his nephew's glass.

"The best thing in the world," he observed drily, as he watched the wine being poured out, "for presentiments."

CHAPTER XVII

Lady Anselman stood once more in the foyer of the Ritz Hotel and counted her guests. It was a smaller party this time, and in its way a less distinguished one. There were a couple of officers, friends of Granet's, back from the Front on leave; Lady Conyers, with Geraldine and Olive; Granet himself; and a tall, dark girl with pallid complexion and brilliant eyes, who had come with Lady Anselman and who was standing now by her side.

"I suppose you know everybody, my dear?" Lady Anselman asked her genially.

The girl shook her head a little disconsolately.

"We are so little in London, Lady Anselman," she murmured. "You know how difficult father is, and just now he is worse than ever. In fact, if he weren't so hard at work I don't believe he'd have let me come even now."

"These scientific men," Lady Anselman declared, "are great boons to the country, but as parents I am afraid they are just a little thoughtless. Major Harrison and Colonel Grey, let me present you to my young charge — for the day only, unfortunately — Miss Worth. Now, Ronnie, if you can be persuaded to let Miss Conyers have a moment's peace perhaps you will show us the way in to lunch."

Granet promptly abandoned his whispered conversation with Geraldine. The little company moved in and took their places at the round table which was usually reserved for Lady Anselman on Tuesdays.

"Some people," the latter remarked, as she seated herself, "find fault with me for going on with my luncheons this season. Even Alfred won't come except now and then. Personally, I have very strong views about it. I think we all ought to keep on doing just the same as usual — to a certain extent, of course. There is no reason why we should bring the hotel proprietors and shopkeepers to the brink of ruin because we are all feeling more or less miserable."

"Quite right," her neighbour, Colonel Grey, assented. "I am sure it wouldn't do us any good out there to feel that you were all sitting in sackcloth and ashes. Besides, think how pleasant this is to come home to," he added, looking around the little table. "Jove! What a good-looking girl Miss Conyers is!"

Lady Anselman nodded and lowered her voice a little.

"She has just broken her engagement to Surgeon-Major Thomson. I wonder whether you know him?"

"Inspector of Field Hospitals or something, isn't he?" the other remarked carelessly. "I came across him once at Boulogne. Rather a dull sort of fellow he seemed."

Lady Anselman sighed.

"I am afraid Geraldine found him so," she agreed. "Her mother is very disappointed. I can't help

thinking myself, though, that a girl with her appearance ought to do better."

The Colonel reflected for a moment.

"Seems to me I've heard something about Thomson somewhere," he said, half to himself. "By-the-bye, who is the pale girl with the wonderful eyes, to whom your nephew is making himself so agreeable?"

"That is Isabel Worth," Lady Anselman replied. "She is the daughter of Sir Meyville Worth, the great scientist. I am afraid she has rather a dull time, poor girl. Her father lives in an out-of-the-way village of Norfolk, spends all his time trying to discover things, and forgets that he has a daughter at all. She has been in London for a few days with an aunt, but I don't believe that the old lady is able to do much for her."

"Ronnie seems to be making the running all right," her neighbour observed.

"I asked him specially to look after her," Lady Anselman confided, "and Ronnie is always such a dear at doing what he is told."

Major Harrison leaned across the table towards them.

"Didn't I hear you mention Thomson's name just now?" he inquired. "I saw him the other day in Boulogne. Awful swell he was about something, too. A destroyer brought him across, and a Government motor-car was waiting at the quay to rush him up to the Front. We all thought at Boulogne that royalty was coming, at least."

There was a slight frown on Granet's forehead. He glanced half unconsciously towards Geraldine.

"Mysterious sort of fellow, Thomson," Major Harrison continued, in blissful ignorance of the peculiar significance of his words. "You see him in Paris one day, you hear of him at the furthermost point of the French lines immediately afterwards, he reports at headquarters within a few hours, and you meet him slipping out of a back door of the War Office, a day or two later."

"Inspector of Field Hospitals is a post which I think must have been created for him," Colonel Grey remarked. "He's an impenetrable sort of chap."

"Was Major Thomson going or returning from France when you saw him last?" Geraldine asked, looking across the table.

"Coming back. When we left Boulogne, the destroyer which brought him over was waiting in the harbour. It passed us in mid-Channel, doing about thirty knots to our eighteen. Prince Cyril was rather sick. He was bringing dispatches but no one seemed to have thought of providing a destroyer for him."

"After all," Lady Anselman murmured, "there is nothing very much more important than our hospitals."

The conversation drifted away from Thomson. Granet was making himself very agreeable indeed to Isabel Worth. There was a little more colour in her cheeks than at the commencement of luncheon, and her manner had become more animated.

"Tell me about the village where you live?" he inquired — "Market Burnham, isn't it?"

"When we first went there," she replied, "I

thought that it was simply Paradise. That was four years ago, though, and I scarcely counted upon spending the winters there."

"You find it lonely, then?"

She shivered a little, half closing her eyes as though to shut out some unpleasant memory.

"The house," she explained, "is on a sort of tongue of land, with a tidal river on either side and the sea not fifty yards away from our drawing-room window. When there are high tides, we are simply cut off from the mainland altogether unless we go across on a farm cart."

"You mustn't draw too gloomy a picture of your home," Lady Anselman said. "I have seen it when it was simply heavenly."

"And I have seen it," the girl retorted, with a note of grimness in her tone, "when it was a great deal more like the other place — stillness that seems almost to stifle you, grey mists that choke your breath and blot out everything; nothing but the gurgling of a little water, and the sighing — the most melancholy sighing you ever heard — of the wind in our ragged elms. I am talking about the autumn and winter now, you must remember."

"It doesn't sound attractive," Granet admitted. "By-the-bye, which side of Norfolk are you? You are nowhere near Brancaster, I suppose?"

"We are within four miles of it," the girl replied quickly. "You don't ever come there, do you?"

Granet looked at her with uplifted eyebrows.

"This is really rather a coincidence!" he exclaimed. "I've never been to Brancaster in my life

but I've promised one or two fellows to go down to the Dormy House there, to-morrow or the next day, and have a week's golf. Geoff Anselman is going, for one."

The girl was for a moment almost good-looking. Her eyes glowed, her tone was eloquently appealing.

"You'll come and see us, won't you?" she begged.

"If I may, I'd be delighted," Granet promised heartily. "When are you going back?"

"To-morrow. You're quite sure that you'll come?"

"I shall come all right," Granet assured her. "I'm not so keen on golf as some of the fellows, and my arm's still a little dicky, but I'm fed up with London, and I'm not allowed even to come before the Board again for a fortnight, so I rather welcome the chance of getting right away. The links are good, I suppose?"

"Wonderful," Miss Worth agreed eagerly, "and I think the club-house is very comfortable. There are often some quite nice men staying there. If only father weren't so awfully peculiar, the place would be almost tolerable in the season. That reminds me," she went on, with a little sigh, "I must warn you about father. He's the most unsociable person that ever lived."

"I'm not shy," Granet laughed. "By-the-bye, pardon me, but isn't your father the Sir Meyville Worth who invents things? I'm not quite sure what sort of things," he added. "Perhaps you'd better post me up before I come?"

"I sha'n't tell you a thing," Isabel Worth de-

clared. "Just now it's very much better for you to know nothing whatever about him. He has what I call the inventors' fidgets, for some reason or other. If a strange person comes near the place, he simply loses his head."

"Perhaps I sha'n't be welcome, then?" Granet remarked disconsolately.

There was a flash in the girl's eyes as she answered him.

"I can assure you that you will, Captain Granet," she said. "If father chooses to behave like a bear, well, I'll try and make up for him."

She glanced at him impressively and Granet bowed. A few minutes later, in obedience to Lady Anselman's signal, they all made their way into the lounge, where coffee was being served. Granet made his way to Geraldine's side but she received him a little coldly.

"I have been doing my aunt's behests," he explained. "My strict orders were to make myself agreeable to a young woman who lives in a sort of bluebeard's house, where no visitors are allowed and smiling is prohibited."

Geraldine looked across at Isabel Worth.

"I never met Miss Worth before," she said. "I believe her father is wonderfully clever. Did I hear you say that you were going out of town?"

Granet nodded.

"I am going away for a few days. I am going away," he added, dropping his voice, "ostensibly for a change of air. I have another reason for going."

He looked at her steadfastly and she forgot her

vague misgivings of a few minutes ago. After all, his perceptions were right. It was better for him to leave London for a time.

"I hope the change will do you good," she said quietly. "I think, perhaps, you are right to go."

CHAPTER XVIII

Granet, a few days later, brought his car to a standstill in front of an ordinary five-barred gate upon which was painted in white letters "Market Burnham Hall." A slight grey mist was falling and the country inland was almost blotted from sight. On the other side of the gate a sandy drive disappeared into an avenue of ragged and stunted elm trees, which effectually concealed any view of the house.

"Seems as though the girl were right," Granet muttered to himself. "However, here goes."

He backed his car close to the side of the hedge, and laying his hand upon the latch of the gate, prepared to swing it open. Almost immediately a figure stepped out from the shrubs.

"Halt!"

Granet looked with surprise at the khaki-clad figure.

"Your name and destination?" the man demanded.

"Captain Granet of the Royal Fusiliers, home from the Front on leave," Granet replied. "I was going up to the Hall to call on Miss Worth."

"Stay where you are, if you please, sir," the man replied.

He stepped back into the sentry box and spoke

through a telephone. In a moment or two he reappeared.

"Pass on, please, sir," he said.

Granet walked slowly up the avenue, his hands behind him, a frown upon his forehead. Perhaps, after all, things were not to be so easy for him. On either side he could see the stretches of sand, and here and there the long creeks of salt water. As he came nearer to the house, the smell of the sea grew stronger, the tops of the trees were more bowed than ever, sand was blown everywhere across the hopeless flower-beds. The house itself, suddenly revealed, was a grim, weather-beaten structure, built on the very edge of a queer, barrowlike tongue of land which ended with the house itself. The sea was breaking on the few yards of beach sheer below the windows. To his right was a walled garden, some lawns and greenhouses; to the left, stables, a garage, and two or three labourer's cottages. At the front door another soldier was stationed doing sentry duty. He stood on one side, however, and allowed Granet to ring the bell.

"Officers quartered here?" Granet inquired.

"Only one, sir," the man replied.

The door was opened almost immediately by a woman-servant. She did not wait for Granet to announce himself but motioned him to follow her into a large, circular, stone hall, across which she led him quickly and threw open the door of the drawing-room. Isabel Worth was standing just inside the room, as though listening. She held out her hand and there was no doubt about her welcome.

"Captain Granet," she said almost in a whisper, "of course you'll think we are all mad, but would you mind coming upstairs into my little sitting-room?"

"Of course not," Granet acquiesced. "I'll come anywhere, with pleasure. What a view you have from here!"

He glanced through the high windows at the other end of the room. She laid her fingers upon his arm and led him towards the door.

"Quietly, please," she whispered. "Try and imagine that you are in a house of conspirators."

She led him up the quaint stone staircase, spiral-shaped, to the first floor. Arrived there, she paused to listen for a moment, then breathed a little more freely and led him to a small sitting-room at the end of a long passage. It was a pleasant little apartment and looked sheer out over the sea. She threw herself down upon a sofa with a sigh of relief, and pointed to a chair.

"Do sit down, Captain Granet," she begged. "I am really not in the least insane but father is. You know, I got back on Wednesday night and was met at once with stern orders that no visitors of any sort were to be received, that the tradespeople were to be interviewed at the front gates — in fact that the house was to be in a state of siege."

Granet appeared puzzled.

"But why?"

"Simply because dad has gone out of his senses," she replied wearily. "Look here."

She led him cautiously to the window and pointed

downwards. About fifty yards out at sea was a queer wooden structure, set up on strong supports. From where they were, nothing was to be seen but a windowless wall of framework and a rope ladder. Underneath, a boat was tethered to one of the supports. About thirty yards away, a man was rowing leisurely around in another small boat.

"That's where father spends about twelve hours a day," she said. "What he is doing no one knows. He won't even allow me to speak of it. When we meet at meals, I am not supposed to allude to the fact that he has been out in that crazy place. If ever he happens to speak of it, he calls it his workshop."

"But he is not alone there?" Granet asked.

"Oh, no! There are two or three men from London, and an American, working with him. Then do you see the corner of the garden there?"

She pointed to a long barn or boathouse almost upon the beach. Before the door two sentries were standing. Even from where they sat they could hear the faint whirr of a dynamo.

"There are twenty men at work in there," she said. "They all sleep in the barn or the potting sheds. They are not allowed even to go down to the village. Now, perhaps, you can begin to understand, Captain Granet, what it is like to be here."

"Well, it all sounds very interesting," he remarked, "but I should think it must be deadly for you. Your father invents no end of wonderful things, doesn't he?"

"If he does, he never speaks about it," the girl

answered, a little bitterly. "All that he wants from me is my absence or my silence. When I came back the other night, he was furious. If he'd thought about it, I'm sure he'd have had me stay in London. Now that I am here, though, I am simply a prisoner."

Granet resumed his seat and lit the cigarette which she insisted upon his smoking.

"Well," he observed, "it does seem hard upon you, Miss Worth. On the other hand, it really is rather interesting, isn't it, to think that your father is such a man of mysteries?"

The girl sighed.

"I suppose so," she admitted, "but then, you see, father is almost brutal about taking any one into his confidence. He never tells even me a thing, or encourages me to ask a question. I think for that reason I have grown rather to resent his work and the ridiculous restriction he places upon my freedom because of it."

A parlourmaid entered with tea, a few minutes later, and Granet moved to his hostess' side upon the sofa. He showed no more interest in outside happenings. He was an adept at light conversation and he made himself thoroughly agreeable for the next hour. Then he rose quickly to his feet.

"I must go," he declared.

She sighed.

"It has been so nice to have you here," she said, "but if you only knew how difficult it was to arrange it, you'd understand why I hesitate to ask you to come again."

"Why shouldn't you come and lunch with me to-morrow at the Golf Club?" he asked.

She hesitated. It was obvious that the suggestion appealed to her.

"I believe I could," she assented. "Captain Chalmers has a small motor-car he'd lend me, and if I go out with my golf clubs it would be all right. Very likely father will sleep out there and we sha'n't see anything of him until to-morrow."

Granet stepped once more to the window. The mists had rolled up more thickly than ever and the queer little structure was almost invisible. A bright light, however, fell upon the water a little distance away.

"Your father has electric light out there," he remarked.

"Yes, they have a wire from the shed," she told him. "Whatever he's trying to do, he needs a very intense and concentrated light at times."

Granet drew a little sigh.

"Well, I hope it's something that'll do us a bit of good," he said. "We need it. The Germans are miles ahead of us with regard to all new-fangled ideas."

She opened her lips and closed them again. Granet, who had suddenly stiffened into rigid attention, felt a quick impulse of disappointment.

"I have rung the bell for my own maid," she said. "She will show you out of the place. Don't let any one see you, if you can help it."

"And to-morrow?" he asked. "You will lunch with me?"

"I will be at the Golf Club," she promised, "at one o'clock."

Granet was conducted almost stealthily down the stairs and into the avenue. Half-way to the gate he paused to listen. He was hidden from sight now by the gathering twilight and the rolling mists. From behind the house came the softly muffled roar of the tide sweeping in, and, with sharper insistence, the whirr of machinery from the boathouse. Granet lit a cigarette and walked thoughtfully away. Just as he climbed into the car, a peculiar light through the trees startled him. He stood up and watched. From the top of the house a slowly revolving searchlight played upon the waters.

CHAPTER XIX

It was a very cheerful little party dining that night at the Dormy House Club. There was Granet; Geoffrey Anselman, his cousin, who played for Cambridge and rowed two; Major Harrison, whose leave had been extended another three weeks; and the secretary of the club, who made up the quartette.

"By-the-bye, where were you this afternoon, Captain Granet?" the latter asked. "You left Anselman to play our best ball. Jolly good hiding he gave us, too."

"Went out for a spin," Granet explained, "and afterwards fell fast asleep in my room. Wonderful air, yours, you know," he went on.

"I slept like a top last night," Major Harrison declared. "The first three nights I was home I never closed my eyes."

Granet leaned across the table to the secretary.

"Dickens," he remarked, "that's a queer-looking fellow at the further end of the room. Who is he?"

The secretary glanced around and smiled.

"You mean that little fellow with the glasses and the stoop? He arrived last night and asked for a match this morning. You see what a miserable, wizened-up looking creature he is? I found him a

twelve man and he wiped the floor with me. Guess what his handicap is?"

"No idea," Granet replied. "Forty, I should think."

"Scratch at St. Andrews," Dickens told them. "His name's Collins. I don't know anything else about him. He's paid for a week and we're jolly glad to get visitors at all these times."

"Bridge or billiards?" young Anselman asked, rising.

"Let's play billiards," Granet suggested. "The stretching across the table does me good."

"We'll have a snooker, then," Major Harrison decided.

They played for some time. The wizened-looking little man came and watched them benevolently, peering every now and then through his spectacles, and applauding mildly any particularly good stroke. At eleven o'clock they turned out the lights and made their way to their rooms. Shortly before midnight, Granet, in his dressing-gown, stole softly across the passage and opened, without knocking, the door of a room opposite to him. The wizened-looking little man was seated upon the edge of the bed, half-dressed. Granet turned the key in the lock, stood for a moment listening and swung slowly around.

"Well?" he exclaimed softly.

The tenant of the room nodded. He had taken off his glasses and their absence revealed a face of strong individuality. He spoke quietly but distinctly.

"You have explored the house?"

"As far as I could," Granet replied. "The place is almost in a state of siege."

"Proves that we are on the right track, any way. What's that building that seems to stand out in the water?"

"How do you know about it?" Granet demanded.

"I sailed out this evening, hired a boat at Brancaster Staithe. The fellow wouldn't go anywhere near Market Burnham, though, and I'm rather sorry I tried to make him. They've got the scares here, right enough, Granet. I asked him to let me the boat for a week and he wasn't even civil about it. Didn't want no strangers around these shores, he told me. When I paid him for the afternoon he was surly about it and kept looking at my field-glasses."

Granet frowned heavily.

"It isn't going to be an easy matter," he confessed. "I hear the Admiralty are going to take over the whole thing within the next few days, and are sending Marines down. How's the time?"

They glanced at their watches. It was five minutes before midnight. As though by common consent, they both crossed to the window and stood looking out into the darkness. A slight wind was moving amongst the treetops, the night was clear but moonless. About half a mile away they could just discern a corner of the club-house. They stood watching it in silence. At five minutes past twelve, Granet shut his watch with a click.

"Not to-night, then," he whispered. "Collins!"

"Well?"

"What is going on in that wooden shanty?"

The little man dropped his voice.

"Germany lost two submarines in one day," he murmured. "The device which got them came from that little workshop of Worth's. The plans are probably there or on the premises somewhere."

Granet groaned.

"As a matter of fact, I have been within a few yards of the thing," he said. "It was all fenced around with match-boarding."

"Do you mean that you have been allowed on board the 'Scorpion'?"

Granet nodded.

"I had the rottenest luck," he declared. "I took Miss Conyers and her friend down to see her brother, Commander Conyers. We were invited to lunch on board. At the last moment we were turned off. Through some glasses from the roof of the 'Ship' I saw some workmen pull down the match-boarding, but I couldn't make out what the structure was."

"I can give you an idea," Collins remarked. "This fellow Worth has got hold of some system of concentric lenses, with extraordinary reflectors which enable him to see distinctly at least thirty feet under water. Then they have a recording instrument, according to which they alter the gradient of a new gun, with shells that explode under water. Von Lowitz was on the track of something of this sort last year, but he gave it up chiefly because Krupps wouldn't guarantee him a shell."

"Krupps gave it up a little too soon, then," Granet muttered. "Collins, if we can't smash up this

little establishment there'll be a dozen destroyers before long rigged up with this infernal contrivance."

The little man stood before the window and gazed steadfastly out seawards.

"They'll be here this week," he said confidently. "You'd better go now, Granet. It's all over for to-night."

Granet nodded and left the room quietly. Every one in the Dormy House was sound asleep. He made his way back to his own apartment without difficulty. Only the little man remained seated at the window, with his eyes fixed upon the bank of murky clouds which lowered over the sea.

CHAPTER XX

Isabel Worth leaned back in the comfortable seat by Granet's side and breathed a little sigh of content. She had enjoyed her luncheon party *à deux*, their stroll along the sands afterwards, and she was fully prepared to enjoy this short drive homewards.

"What a wonderful car yours is!" she murmured. "But do tell me — what on earth have you got in behind?"

"It's just a little experimental invention of a friend of mine," he explained. "Some day we are going to try it on one of these creeks. It's a collapsible canvas boat."

"Don't try it anywhere near us," she laughed. "Two of the fishermen from Wells sailed in a little too close to the shed yesterday and the soldiers fired a volley at them."

Granet made a grimace.

"Do you know I am becoming most frightfully curious about your father's work?" he observed.

"Are you really?" she replied carelessly. "For my part, I wouldn't even take the trouble to climb up the ladder into the workshop."

"But you must know something about what is going on there?" Granet persisted.

"I really don't," she assured him. "It's some wonderful invention, I believe, but I can't help resenting anything that makes us live like hermits, suspect even the tradespeople, give up entertaining altogether, give up even seeing our friends. I hope you are not going to hurry away, Captain Granet. I haven't had a soul to speak to down here for months."

"I don't think I shall go just yet," he answered. "I want first to accomplish what I came here for."

She turned her head very slowly and looked at him. There was quite a becoming flush upon her cheeks.

"What did you come for?" she asked softly.

He was silent for a moment. Already his foot was on the brake of the car; they were drawing near the plain, five-barred gates.

"Perhaps I am not quite sure about that myself," he whispered.

They had come to a standstill. She descended reluctantly.

"I hate to send you away," she sighed, "it seems so inhospitable. Will you come in for a little time? The worst that can happen, if we meet dad, is that he might be rather rude."

"I'll risk it with pleasure," Granet replied.

"Can I see your collapsible boat?" she asked, peering in behind.

He shook his head.

"It isn't my secret," he said, "and besides, I don't think my friend has the patent for it yet."

The sentry stood by and allowed them to pass, al-

though he looked searchingly at Granet. They walked slowly up the scrubby avenue to the house. Once Granet paused to look down at the long arm of the sea on his left.

"You have quite a river there," he remarked.

She nodded.

"That used to be the principal waterway from Burnham village. Quite a large boat can get down now at high tide."

They entered the house and Isabel gave a little gesture of dismay. She clutched for a moment at Granet's arm. An elderly man, dressed in somber black clothes disgracefully dusty, collarless, with a mass of white hair blown all over his face, was walking up and down the hall with a great pair of horn-rimmed spectacles clutched in his hand. He stopped short at the sound of the opening door and hurried towards them. There was nothing about his appearance in the least terrifying. He seemed, in fact, bubbling over with excited good-humour.

"Isabel, my dear," he exclaimed, "it is wonderful! I have succeeded! I have changed the principles of a lifetime, made the most brilliant optical experiment which any man of science has ever ventured to essay, with the result — well, you shall see. I have wired to the Admiralty, wired for more workpeople. Captain Chalmers, is it not?" he went on. "You must tell your men to double and redouble their energies. This place is worth watching now. Come, I will show you something amazing."

He turned and led them hastily towards the back door. Isabel gripped Granet's arm.

"He thinks you are the officer in command of the platoon here," she whispered. "Better let him go on thinking so."

Granet nodded.

"Is he going to take us to the workshop?"

"I believe so," she assented.

They had hard work to keep up with Sir Meyville as he led them hastily down the little stretch of shingle to where a man was sitting in a boat. They all jumped in. The man with the oars looked doubtfully for a moment at Granet, but pulled off at once when ordered to do so. They rowed round to the front of the queer little structure. A man from inside held out his hand and helped them up. Another young man, with books piled on the floor by his side, was making some calculations at a table. Almost the whole of the opening of the place was taken up by what seemed to be a queer medley of telescopes and lenses pointing different ways. Sir Meyville beamed upon them as he hastily turned a handle.

"Now," he promised, "you shall see what no one has ever seen before. See, I point the arrow at that spot, about fifty yards out. Now look through this one, Isabel."

The girl stooped forward, was silent for a moment, then she gave a little cry of wonder. She clutched Granet's arm and made him take her place. He, too, called out softly. He saw the sandy bottom covered with shells, a rock with tentacles of seaweed floating from it, several huge crabs, a multitude of small fishes. Everything was clear and distinct. He looked away with a little gasp.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed.

Sir Meyville's smile was beatific.

"That is my share," he said. "Down in the other workshop my partners are hard at it. They, too, have met with success. You must tell your men, Captain Chalmers, never to relax their vigil. This place must be watched by night and by day. My last invention was a great step forward, but this is absolute success. For the next few months this is the most precious spot in Europe."

"It isn't Captain Chalmers, father," Isabel interrupted.

Sir Meyville seemed suddenly to become still. He looked fixedly at Granet.

"Who are you, then?" he demanded. "Who are you, sir?"

"I am Captain Granet of the Royal Fusiliers, back from the Front, wounded," Granet replied. "I can assure you that I am a perfectly trustworthy person."

"But I don't understand," Sir Meyville said sharply. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to call upon your daughter," Granet explained. "I had the pleasure of meeting her at lunch at Lady Anselman's the other day. We have been playing golf together at Brancaster."

Sir Meyville began to mumble to himself as he pushed them into the boat.

"My fault," he muttered, — "my fault. Captain Granet, I thought that my daughter knew my wishes. I am not at present in a position to receive guests or visitors of any description. You will pardon my

apparent inhospitality. I shall ask you, sir, to kindly forget this visit and to keep away from here for the present."

"I shall obey your wishes, of course, sir," Granet promised. "I can assure you that I am quite a harmless person, though."

"I do not doubt it, sir," Sir Meyville replied, "but it is the harmless people of the world who do the most mischief. An idle word here or there and great secrets are given away. If you will allow me, I will show you a quicker way down the avenue, without going to the house."

Granet shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you will, sir," he assented.

"You can go in, Isabel," her father directed curtly. "I will see Captain Granet off."

She obeyed and took leave of her guest with a little shrug of the shoulders. Sir Meyville took Granet's arm and led him down the avenue.

"Captain Granet," he said gravely, "I am an indiscreet person and I have an indiscreet daughter. Bearing in mind your profession, I may speak to you as man to man. Keep what you have seen absolutely secret. Put a seal upon your memory. Go back to Brancaster and don't even look again in this direction. The soldiers round this place have orders not to stand on ceremony with any one, and by to-night I believe we are to have an escort of Marines here as well. What you have seen is for the good of the country."

"I congratulate you heartily, sir," Granet replied, shaking hands. "Of course I'll keep away, if I

must. I hope when this is all over, though, you will allow me to come and renew my acquaintance with your daughter."

"When it is over, with pleasure," Sir Meyville assented.

Granet stepped into his car and drove off. The inventor stood looking after him. Then he spoke to the sentry and made his way across the gardens towards the boat-shed.

"I ought to have known it from the first," he muttered. "Reciprocal refraction was the one thing to think about."

Granet, as he drove back to the Dormy House, was conscious of a curious change in the weather. The wind, which had been blowing more or less during the last few days, had suddenly dropped. There was a new heaviness in the atmosphere, little banks of transparent mist were drifting in from seawards. More than once he stopped the car and, standing up, looked steadily away seawards. The long stretch of marshland, on which the golf links were situated, was empty. A slight, drizzling rain was falling. He found, when he reached the Dormy House, that nearly all the men were assembled in one of the large sitting-rooms. A table of bridge had been made up. Mr. Collins was seated in an easy-chair close to the window, reading a review. Granet accepted a cup of tea and stood on the hearthrug.

"How did the golf go this afternoon?" he inquired.

"I was dead off it," Anselman replied gloomily.

"Our friend in the easy-chair there knocked spots off us."

Mr. Collins looked up and grunted and looked out of the window again.

"Either of you fellows going to cut in at bridge?" young Anselman continued.

Granet shook his head and walked to the window.

"I can't stick cards in the daytime."

Mr. Collins shut up his review.

"I agree with you, sir," he said. "I endeavoured to persuade one of these gentlemen to play another nine holes — unsuccessfully, I regret to state."

Granet lit a cigarette.

"Well," he remarked, "it's too far to get down to the links again but I'll play you a game of bowls, if you like."

The other glanced out upon the lawn and rose to his feet.

"It is an excellent suggestion," he declared. "If you will give me five minutes to fetch my mackintosh and goloshes, it would interest me to see whether I have profited by the lessons I took in Scotland."

They met, a few moments later, in the garden. Mr. Collins threw the jack with great precision and they played an end during which his superiority was apparent. They strolled together across the lawn, well away now from the house. For the first time Granet dropped his careless tone.

"What do you make of this change in the weather?" he asked quickly.

"It's just what they were waiting for," the other replied. "What about this afternoon?"

"I am no scientist, worse luck," Granet replied impatiently, "but I saw enough to convince me that they've got the right idea. Sir Meyville thought I was the man commanding the escort they've given him, — actually rowed me out to the workshop and showed me the whole thing. I tell you I saw it just as you described it, — saw the bottom of the sea, even the colour of the seaweed, the holes in the rocks."

"And they've got the shells, too," Collins muttered, "the shells that burst under water."

Granet looked around. They were playing the other end now.

"Listen!" he said.

They paused in the middle of the lawn. Granet held up his handkerchief and turned his cheek seaward. There was still little more than a floating breath of air but his cheek was covered with moisture.

"I have everything ready," he said. "Just before we go to bed to-night I shall swear that I hear an aeroplane. You're sure your watch is right to the second, Collins?"

"I am as sure that it is right," the other replied grimly, "as I am that to-night you and I, my young friend, are going to play with our lives a little more carelessly than with this china ball. A good throw, that, I think," he went on, measuring it with his eye carefully. "Come, my friend, you'll have to improve. My Scotch practice is beginning to tell."

Geoffrey Anselman threw up the window and looked out.

"Pretty hot stuff, isn't he, Ronnie?" he asked.

Granet glanced at his opponent, with his bent

shoulders, his hard face, hooked nose and thin gold spectacles.

"Yes," he admitted quietly, "he's too good for me."

CHAPTER XXI

At about half-past ten that evening, Granet suddenly threw down his cue in the middle of a game of billiards, and stood, for a moment, in a listening attitude.

"Jove, I believe that's an airship!" he exclaimed, and hurried out of the room.

They all followed him. He was standing just outside the French-windows of the sitting-room, upon the gravel walk, his head upturned, listening intently. There was scarcely a breath of wind, no moon nor any stars. Little clouds of grey mist hung about on the marshes, shutting out their view of the sea. The stillness was more than usually intense.

"Can't hear a thing," young Anselman muttered at last.

"It may have been fancy," Granet admitted.

"A motor-cycle going along the Hunstanton Road," Major Harrison suggested.

"It's a magnificent night for a raid," Dickens remarked, glancing around.

"No chance of Zepps over here, I should say," Collins declared, a little didactically. "I was looking at your map at the golf club only this morning."

They all made their way back to the house. Granet, however, seemed still dissatisfied.

"I'm going to see that my car's all right," he told them. "I left it in the open shed."

He was absent for about twenty minutes. When he returned, they had finished the game of snooker pool without him and were all sitting on the lounge by the side of the billiard table, talking of the war. Granet listened for a few minutes and then said good-night a little abruptly. He lit his candle outside and went slowly to his room. Arrived there, he glanced at his watch and locked the door. It was half-past eleven. He changed his clothes quickly, put on some rubber-soled shoes and slipped a brandy flask and a revolver into his pocket. Then he sat down before his window with his watch in his hand. He was conscious of a certain foreboding from which he had never been able to escape since his arrival. In France and Belgium he had lived through fateful hours, carrying more than once his life in his hands. His risk to-night was an equal one but the exhilaration seemed lacking. This work in a country apparently at peace seemed somehow on a different level. If it were less dangerous, it was also less stimulating. In those few moments the soldier blood in him called for the turmoil of war, the panorama of life and death, the fierce, hot excitement of juggling with fate while the heavens themselves seemed raining death on every side. Here there was nothing but silence, the soft splash of the distant sea, the barking of a distant dog. The danger was vivid and actual but without the stimulus of that blood-red background. He glanced at his watch. It wanted still ten minutes to twelve. For a moment then he suf-

fered his thoughts to go back to the new thing which had crept into his life. He was suddenly back in the Milan, he saw the backward turn of her head, the almost wistful look in her eyes as she made her little pronouncement. She had broken her engagement. Why? It was a battle, indeed, he was fighting with that still, cold antagonist, whom he half despised and half feared, the man concerning whose actual personality he had felt so many doubts. What if things should go wrong to-night, if the whole dramatic story should be handed over for the glory and wonder of the halfpenny press! He could fancy their headlines, imagine even their trenchant paragraphs. It was skating on the thinnest of ice — and for what? His fingers gripped the damp window-sill. He raised himself a little higher. His eyes fell upon his watch — still a minute or two to twelve. Slowly he stole to his door and listened. The place was silent. He made his way on tiptoe across the landing and entered Collins' room. The latter was seated before the wide-open window. He had blown out his candle and the room was in darkness. He half turned his head at Granet's entrance.

"Two minutes!" he exclaimed softly. "Granet, it will be to-night. Are you ready?"

"Absolutely!"

They stood by the open window in silence. Nothing had changed. It was not yet time for the singing of the earliest birds. The tiny village lay behind them, silent and asleep; in front, nothing but the marshes, uninhabited, lonely and quiet, the golf clubhouse empty and deserted. They stood and watched,

their faces turned steadfastly in a certain direction. Gradually their eyes, growing accustomed to the dim and changing light, could pierce the black line above the grey where the sea came stealing up the sandy places with low murmurs, throwing with every wave longer arms into the land.

"Twelve o'clock!" Collins muttered.

Suddenly Granet's fingers dug into his shoulder. From out of that pall of velvet darkness which hung below the clouds, came for a single moment a vision of violet light. It rose apparently from nowhere, it passed away into space. It was visible barely for five seconds, then it had gone. Granet spoke with a little sob.

"My God!" he murmured. "They're coming!"

Collins was already on his feet. He had straightened himself wonderfully, and there was a new alertness in his manner. He, too, wore rubber shoes and his movements were absolutely noiseless. He carried a little electric torch in his hand, which he flashed around the room while he placed several small articles in his pocket. Then he pushed open the door and listened. He turned back, held up his finger and nodded. The two men passed down the stairs, through the sitting-room, out on to the lawn by a door left unfastened, and round the house to the shed. Together they pushed the car down the slight incline of the drive. Granet mounted into the driving-seat and pressed the self-starter. Collins took the place by his side.

"Remember," Granet whispered, "we heard something and I met you in the hall. Sit tight."

They sped with all the silence and smoothness of their six-cylinder up the tree-hung road, through the sleeping village and along the narrow lane to Market Burnham. When they were within about a hundred yards of the gate, Granet brought the car to a standstill.

"There are at least two sentries that way," he said, "and if Sir Meyville told me the truth, they may have a special guard of Marines out to-night. This is where we take to the marshes. Listen. Can you hear anything?"

They both held their breath.

"Nothing yet," Collins muttered. "Let's get the things out quickly."

Granet hurried to the back of the car, ripping open the coverings. In a few moments they had dragged over the side a small collapsible boat of canvas stretched across some bamboo joints, with two tiny sculls. They clambered up the bank.

"The creek must be close here," Granet whispered. "Don't show a light. Listen!"

This time they could hear the sound of an engine beating away in the boat-house on the other side of the Hall. Through the closely-drawn curtains, too, they could see faint fingers of light from the house on the sea.

"They are working still," Granet continued. "Look out, Collins, that's the creek."

They pushed the boat into the middle of the black arm of water and stepped cautiously into it. Taking one of the paddles, Granet, kneeling down, propelled it slowly seaward. Once or twice they ran

into the bank and had to push off, but very soon their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. By degrees the creek broadened. They passed close to the walls of the garden, and very soon they were perceptibly nearer the quaintly-situated workshop. Granet paused for a moment from his labours.

"The Hall is dark enough," he muttered. Listen!"

They heard the regular pacing of a sentinel in the drive. Nearer to them, on the top of the wall, they fancied that they heard the clash of a bayonet. Granet dropped his voice to the barest whisper.

"We are close there now. Stretch out your hand, Collins. Can you feel a shelf of rock?"

"It's just in front of me," was the stifled answer.

"That's for the stuff. Down with it."

For a few moments Collins was busy. Then, with a little gasp, he gripped Granet's arm. His voice, shaking with nervous repression, was still almost hysterical.

"They're coming, Granet! My God, they're coming!"

Both men turned seaward. Far away in the clouds, it seemed, they could hear a faint humming, some new sound, something mechanical in its regular beating, yet with clamorous throatiness of some human force cleaving its way through the resistless air. With every second it grew louder. The men stood clutching one another.

"Have you got the fuse ready? They must hear it in a moment." Granet muttered.

Collins assented silently. The reverberations be-

came louder and louder. Soon the air was full of echoes. From far away inland dogs were barking, from a farm somewhere the other side of the road they heard the shout of a single voice.

"Now," Granet whispered.

Collins leaned forward. The fuse in his hand touched the dark substance which he had spread out upon the rock. In a moment a strange, unearthly, green light seemed to roll back the darkness. The house, the workshop, the trees, the slowly flowing sea, their own ghastly faces — everything stood revealed in a blaze of hideous, awful light. For a moment they forgot themselves, they forgot the miracle they had brought to pass. Their eyes were rivetted skyward. High above them, something blacker than the heavens themselves, stupendous, huge, seemed suddenly to assume to itself shape. The roar of machinery was clearly audible. From the house came the mingled shouting of many voices. Something dropped into the sea a hundred yards away with a screech and a hiss, and a geyser-like fountain leapt so high that the spray reached them. Then there was a sharper sound as a rifle bullet whistled by.

"My God!" Granet exclaimed. "It's time we were out of this, Collins!"

He seized his scull. Even at that moment there was a terrific explosion. A stream of lurid fire seemed to leap from the corner of the house, the wall split and fell outwards. And then there came another sound, hideous, sickly, a sound Granet had heard before, the sound of a rifle bullet cutting its

way through flesh, followed by an inhuman cry. For a moment Collins' arms whirled around him. Then, with no other sound save that one cry, he fell forward and disappeared. For a single second Granet leaned over the side of the boat as though to dive after him. Then came another roar. The sand flew up in a blinding storm, the whole of the creek was suddenly a raging torrent. The boat was swung on a precipitous mountain of salt water and as quickly capsized. Granet, breathless for a moment and half stunned, found his way somehow to the side of the marshland, and from there stumbled his way towards the road. The house behind him was on fire, the air seemed filled with hoarse shoutings. He turned and ran for the spot where he had left the car. Once he fell into a salt water pool and came out wet through to the waist. In the end, however, he reached the bank, clambered over it and slipped down into the road. Then a light was flashed into his eyes and a bayonet was rattled at his feet. There were a couple of soldiers in charge of his car.

"Hands up!" was the hoarse order.

Granet calmly flashed his own electric torch. There were at least a dozen soldiers standing around, and a little company were hurrying down from the gates. He switched off his light almost immediately.

"Is any one hurt?" he asked.

There was a dead silence. He felt his arm seized on either side.

"The captain's coming down the road," one of the men said. "Lay on to him, Tim!"

CHAPTER XXII

Granet sauntered in to breakfast a few minutes late on the following morning. A little volley of questions and exclamations reached him as he stood by the sideboard.

"Heard about the Zeppelin raid?"

"They say there's a bomb on the ninth green!"

"Market Burnham Hall is burnt to the ground!"

Granet sighed as he crossed the room and took his seat at the table.

"If you fellows hadn't slept like oxen last night," he remarked, "you'd have known a lot more about it. I saw the whole show."

"Nonsense!" Major Harrison exclaimed.

"Tell us all about it?" young Anselman begged.

"I heard the thing just as I was beginning to undress," Granet explained. "I rushed downstairs and found Collins out in the garden. . . . Where the devil is Collins, by-the-bye?"

They glanced at his vacant place.

"Not down yet. Go on."

"Well, we could hear the vibration like anything, coming from over the marsh there. I got the car out and we were no sooner on the road than I could see it distinctly, right above us — a huge, cigar-

shaped thing. We raced along after it, along the road towards Market Burnham. Just before it reached the Hall it seemed to turn inland and then come back again. We pulled up to watch it and Collins jumped out. He said he'd go as far as the Hall and warn them. I sat in the car, watching. She came right round and seemed to hover over those queer sort of outbuildings there are at Market Burnham. All at once the bombs began to drop."

"What are they like?" Geoffrey Anselman exclaimed.

Granet poured out his coffee carefully.

"I've seem 'em before — plenty of them, too," he remarked, "but they did rain them down. Then all of a sudden there was a sort of glare — I don't know what happened. It was just as though some one had lit one of those coloured lights. The Hall was just as clearly visible as at noonday. I could see the men running about, shouting, and the soldiers tumbling out of their quarters. All the time the bombs were coming down like hail and a corner of the Hall was in flames. Then the lighted stuff, whatever it was, burnt out and the darkness seemed as black as pitch. I hung around for some time, looking for Collins. Then I went up to the house to help them extinguish the fire. I didn't get back till four o'clock."

"What about Collins?" young Anselman asked. "I was playing him at golf."

"Better send up and see," Granet proposed. "I waited till I couldn't stick it any longer."

They sent a servant up. The reply came back

quickly — Mr. Collins' bed had not been slept in. Granet frowned a little.

"I suppose he'll think I let him down," he said. "I waited at least an hour for him."

"Was any one hurt by the bombs?" Geoffrey Anselman inquired.

"No one seemed to be much the worse," Granet replied. "I didn't think of anything of that sort in connection with Collins, though. Perhaps he might have got hurt."

"We'll all go over and have a look for him this afternoon if he hasn't turned up," Anselman suggested. "What about playing me a round of golf this morning?"

"Suit me all right," Granet agreed. "I'd meant to lay up because of my arm, but it's better this morning. We'll start early and get back for the papers."

They motored down to the club-house and played their round. It was a wonderful spring morning, with a soft west wind blowing from the land. Little patches of sea lavender gave purple colour to the marshland. The creeks, winding their way from the sea to the village, shone like quicksilver beneath the vivid sunshine. It was a morning of utter and complete peace. Granet, notwithstanding a little trouble with his arm, played carefully and well. When at last they reached the eighteenth green, he holed a wonderful curly putt for the hole and the match.

"A great game," his cousin declared, as they left the green. "Who the devil are these fellows?"

There were two soldiers standing at the gate, and

a military motor-car drawn up by the side of the road. An orderly stepped forward and addressed Granet.

"Captain Granet?" he asked, saluting.

Granet nodded and stretched out his hand for the note. The fingers which drew it from the envelope were perfectly steady, he even lifted his head for a moment to look at a lark just overhead. Yet the few hastily scrawled lines were like a message of fate: —

The officer in command at Market Burnham Hall would be obliged if Captain Granet would favour him with an immediate interview, with reference to the events of last night.

"Do you mean that you want me to go at once, before luncheon?" he asked the orderly.

The man pointed to the car.

"My instructions were to take you back at once, sir."

"Come and have a drink first, at any rate," Geoffrey Anselman insisted.

The orderly shook his head, the two soldiers were barring the gateway.

"Some one from the War Office has arrived and is waiting to speak to Captain Granet," he announced.

"We're all coming over after lunch," young Anselman protested. "Wouldn't that do?"

The man made no answer. Granet, with a shrug of the shoulders, stepped into the motor-car. The two soldiers mounted motor-cycles and the little cav-

alcade turned away. Granet made a few efforts at conversation with his companion, but, meeting with no response, soon relapsed into silence. In less than twenty minutes the car was slowing down before the approach to the Hall. The lane was crowded with villagers and people from the neighbouring farm-houses, who were all kept back, however, by a little cordon of soldiers. Granet, closely attended by his escort, made his way slowly into the avenue and up towards the house. A corner of the left wing of the building was in ruins, blackened and still smouldering, and there was a great hole in the sand-blown lawn, where a bomb had apparently fallen. A soldier admitted them at the front entrance and his guide led him across the hall and into a large room on the other side of the house, an apartment which seemed to be half library, half morning-room. Sir Meyville and a man in uniform were talking together near the window. They turned around at Granet's entrance and he gave a little start. For the first time a thrill of fear chilled him, his self-confidence was suddenly dissipated. The man who stood watching him with cold scrutiny was the one man on earth whom he feared — Surgeon-Major Thomson!

CHAPTER XXIII

It was a queer little gathering in the drawing-room of Market Burnham Hall, queer and in a sense ominous. Two soldiers guarded the door. Another one stood with his back to the wide-flung window, the sunlight flashing upon his drawn bayonet. Granet, although he looked about him for a moment curiously, carried himself with ease and confidence.

"How do you do, Sir Meyville?" he said. "How are you, Thomson?"

Sir Meyville, who was in a state of great excitement, took absolutely no notice of the young man's greeting. Thomson pointed to a chair, in which Granet at once seated himself.

"I have sent for you, Captain Granet," the former began, "to ask you certain questions with reference to the events of last night."

"Delighted to tell you anything I can," Granet replied. "Isn't this a little out of your line, though, Thomson?"

Sir Meyville suddenly leaned forward.

"That is the young man," he declared. "I took him to be the officer in command here and I showed him over my workshop. Quite a mistake — absolutely a wrong impression!"

"It was a mistake for which you could scarcely hold me responsible," Granet protested, "and you must really excuse me if I fail to see the connection. Perhaps you will tell me, Major Thomson, what I am here for?"

Major Thomson seated himself before the desk and leaned a little back in his chair.

"We sent for you," he said, "because we are looking for two men who lit the magnesium light which directed the Zeppelin last night to this locality. One of them lies on the lawn there, with a bullet through his brain. We are still looking for the other."

"Do you imagine that I can be of any assistance to you?" Granet asked.

"That is our impression," Major Thomson admitted. "Perhaps you will be so good as to tell us what you were doing here last night?"

"Certainly," Granet replied. "About half-past ten last night I thought I heard the engine of an airship. We all went out on the lawn but could see nothing. However, I took that opportunity to get my car ready in case there was any excitement going. Later on, as I was on my way upstairs, I distinctly heard the sound once more. I went out, started my car, and drove down the lane. It seemed to be coming in this direction so I followed along, pulled up short of the house, climbed on the top of the bank and saw that extraordinary illumination from the marshland on the other side. I saw a man in a small boat fall back as though he were shot. A moment or two later I returned to my car and was accosted by

two soldiers, to whom I gave my name and address. That is really all I know about the matter."

Major Thomson nodded.

"You had only just arrived, then, when the bombs were dropped?"

"I pulled up just before the illumination," Granet asserted.

Thomson looked at him thoughtfully.

"I am going to make a remark, Captain Granet," he said, "upon which you can comment or not, as you choose. Was not your costume last night rather a singular one for the evening? You say that you were on your way upstairs to undress when you heard the Zeppelin. Do you wear rubber shoes and a Norfolk jacket for dinner?"

Granet for a moment bit his lip.

"I laid out those things in case there was anything doing," he said. "As I told you, I felt sure that I had heard an airship earlier in the evening, and I meant to try and follow it if I heard it again."

There was a brief silence. Granet lounged a little back in his chair, but though his air of indifference was perfect, a sickening foreboding was creeping in upon him. He was conscious of failure, of blind, idiotic folly. Never before had he been guilty of such miserable short-sightedness. He fought desperately against the toils which he felt were gradually closing in upon him. There must be some way out!

"Captain Granet," his questioner continued, in his calm, emotionless tone, "according to your story you changed your clothes and reached here at the

same time as the Zeppelin, after having heard its approach. It is four miles and a half to the Dormy House Club, and that Zeppelin must have been travelling at the rate of at least sixty miles an hour. Is your car capable of miracles? "

" It is capable of sixty miles an hour," Granet declared.

" Perhaps I may spare you the trouble," Thomson proceeded drily, " of further explanations, Captain Granet, when I tell you that your car was observed by one of the sentries quite a quarter of an hour before the arrival of the Zeppelins and the lighting of that flare. Your statements, to put it mildly, are irreconcilable with the facts of the case. I must ask you once more if you have any other explanation to give as to your movements last night? "

" What other explanation can I give? " Granet asked, his brain working fiercely. " I have told you the truth. What more can I say? "

" You have told me," Major Thomson went on, and his voice seemed like the voice of fate, " that you arrived here in hot haste simultaneously with the lighting of that flare and the dropping of the bombs. Not only one of the sentries on guard here, but two other people have given evidence that your car was out there in the lane for at least a quarter of an hour previous to the happenings of which I have just spoken. For the last time, Captain Granet, I must ask you whether you wish to amend your explanation? "

There was a little movement at the further end of the room. A curtain was drawn back and Isabel

Worth came slowly towards them. She stood there, the curtains on either side of her, ghastly pale, her hands, clasped in front of her, twitching nervously.

"I am very sorry," she said. "This is all my fault."

They stared at her in amazement. Only Granet, with an effort, kept his face expressionless. Sir Meyville began to mutter to himself.

"God bless my soul!" he mumbled. "Isabel, what do you want, girl? Can't you see that we are engaged?"

She took no notice of him. She turned appealingly towards Major Thomson.

"Can you send the soldiers away for a moment?" she begged. "I don't think that they will be needed."

Major Thomson gave a brief order and the men left the room. Isabel came a little nearer to the table. She avoided looking at Granet.

"I am very sorry indeed," she went on, "if anything I have done has caused all this trouble. Captain Granet came down here partly to play golf, partly at my invitation. He was here yesterday afternoon, as my father knows. Before he left — I asked him to come over last night."

There was a breathless silence. Isabel was standing at the end of the table, her fingers still clasped nervously together, a spot of intense colour in her cheeks. She kept her eyes turned sedulously away from Granet. Sir Meyville gripped her by the shoulder.

"What do you mean, girl?" he demanded

harshly. "What do you mean by all this rubbish? Speak out."

Granet looked up for a moment.

"Don't," he begged. "I can clear myself, Miss Worth, if any one is mad enough to have suspicions about me. I should never — "

"The truth may just as well be told," she interrupted. "There is nothing to be ashamed of. It is hideously dull down here, and the life my father has asked me to lead for the last few months has been intolerable. I never sleep, and I invited Captain Granet to come over here at twelve o'clock last night and take me for a motor ride. I was dressed, meaning to go, and Captain Granet came to fetch me. It turned out to be impossible because of all the new sentries about the place, but that is why Captain Granet was here, and that," she concluded, turning to Major Thomson, "is why, I suppose, he felt obliged to tell you what was not the truth. It has been done before."

There was a silence which seemed composed of many elements. Sir Meyville Worth stood with his eyes fixed upon his daughter and an expression of blank, uncomprehending dismay in his features. Granet, a frown upon his forehead, was looking towards the floor. Thomson, with the air of seeing nobody, was studying them all in turn. It was he who spoke first.

"As you justly remark, Miss Worth," he observed, "this sort of thing has been done before. We will leave it there for the present. Will you come this way with me, if you please, Captain Granet? I won't

trouble you, Miss Worth, or you, Sir Meyville. You might not like what we are going to see."

Granet rose at once to his feet.

"Of course, I will come wherever you like," he assented.

The two men passed together side by side, in momentous silence, across the stone hall, out of the house, and round the back of the garden to a wooden shed, before which was posted a sentry. The man stood on one side to let them pass. On the bare stone floor inside was stretched the dead body of Collins. The salt water was still oozing from his clothes and limbs, running away in little streams. There was a small blue hole in the middle of his forehead.

"This, apparently," Thomson said, "is the man who lit the magnesium light which showed the Zeppelin where to throw her bombs. The thing was obviously prearranged. Can you identify him?"

"Identify him?" Granet exclaimed. "Why, I was playing bowls with him yesterday afternoon. He is a Glasgow merchant named Collins, and a very fine golf player. He is staying at the Dormy House Club."

"He has also another claim to distinction," Major Thomson remarked drily, "for he is the man who fired those lights. The sergeant who shot him fancied that he heard voices on the creek, and crept up to the wall just before the flare came. The sergeant, I may add, is under the impression that there were two men in the boat."

Granet shook his head dubiously.

"I know nothing whatever of the man or his

movements," he declared, "beyond what I have told you. I have scarcely spoken a dozen words to him in my life, and never before our chance meeting at the Dormy House."

"You do not, for instance, happen to know how he came here from the Dormy House?"

"If you mean did he come in my car," Granet answered easily, "please let me assure you that he did not. My errand here last night was indiscreet enough, but I certainly shouldn't have brought another man, especially a stranger, with me."

"Thank you," Major Thomson concluded, "that is all I have to say to you for the present."

"Has there been much damage done?" Granet inquired.

"Very little."

They had reached the corner of the avenue. Granet glanced down towards the road.

"I presume," he remarked, "that I am at liberty to depart?"

Thomson gave a brief order to the soldier who had been attending them.

"You will find the car in which you came waiting to take you back, Captain Granet," he announced.

The two men had paused. Granet was on the point of departure. With the passing of his sudden apprehension of danger, his curiosity was awakened.

"Do you mind telling me, Major Thomson," he asked, "how it is that you, holding, I presume, a medical appointment, were selected to conduct an inquiry like this? I have voluntarily submitted myself to your questioning, but if I had had anything

to conceal I might have been inclined to dispute your authority."

Thomson's face was immovable. He simply pointed to the gate at the end of the avenue.

"If it had been necessary, Captain Granet," he said coldly, "I should have been able to convince you that I was acting under authority. As it is, I wish you good-morning."

Granet hesitated, but only for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Good-morning, Major!"

He made his way down to the lane, which was still crowded with villagers and loungers. He was received with a shower of questions as he climbed into the car.

"Not much damage done that I can hear," he told them all. "The corner of the house caught fire and the lawn looks like a sand-pit."

He was driven in silence back to the Dormy House. When he arrived there the place was deserted. The other men were lunching at the golf club. He made his way slowly to the impromptu shed which served for a garage. His own car was standing there. He looked all around to make sure that he was absolutely alone. Then he lifted up the cushion by the driving-seat. Carefully folded and arranged in the corner were the horn-rimmed spectacles and the silk handkerchief of the man who was lying at Market Burnham with a bullet through his forehead.

CHAPTER XXIV

Mr. Gordon Jones rose to his feet. It had been an interesting, in some respects a momentous interview. He glanced around the plain but handsomely furnished office, a room which betrayed so few evidences of the world-flung power of its owner.

"After all, Sir Alfred," he remarked, smiling, "I am not sure that it is Downing Street which rules. We can touch our buttons and move armies and battleships across the face of the earth. You pull down your ledger, sign your name, and you can strike a blow as deadly as any we can conceive."

The banker smiled.

"Let us be thankful, then," he said, "that the powers we wield are linked together in the great cause."

Mr. Gordon Jones hesitated.

"Such things, I know, are little to you, Sir Alfred," he continued, "but at the same time I want you to believe that his Majesty's Government will not be unmindful of your help at this juncture. To speak of rewards at such a time is perhaps premature. I know that ordinary honours do not appeal to you, yet it has been suggested to me by a certain person that I should assure you of the country's gratitude. In plain words, there is nothing you may ask for which it would not be our pleasure and privilege to give you."

Sir Alfred bowed slightly.

"You are very kind," he said. "Later on, perhaps, one may reflect. At present there seems to be only one stern duty before us, and for that one needs no reward."

The two men parted. Sir Alfred rose from the chair in front of his desk and threw himself into the easy-chair which his guest had been occupying. A ray of city sunshine found its way through the tangle of tall buildings on the other side of the street, lay in a zigzag path across his carpet, and touched the firm lines of his thoughtful face. He sat there, slowly tapping the sides of the chair with his pudgy fingers. So a great soldier might have sat, following out the progress of his armies in different countries, listening to the roar of their guns, watching their advance, their faltering, their success and their failures. Sir Alfred's vision was in a sense more sordid, in many ways more complicated, yet it, too, had its dramatic side. He looked at the money-markets of the world, he saw exchanges rise and fall. He saw in the dim vista no khaki-clad army with flashing bayonets, but a long, thin line of black-coated men with sallow faces, clutching their money-bags.

There was a knock at the door and his secretary entered.

"Captain Granet has been here for some time, sir," he announced softly.

The banker came back to the present. He woke up, indeed, with a little start.

"Show my nephew in at once," he directed. "I shall be engaged with him for at least a quarter of

an hour. Kindly go round to the Bank of England and arrange an interview with Mr. Williams for three o'clock this afternoon."

The clerk silently withdrew. Granet entered, a few minutes later. The banker greeted him pleasantly.

"Well, Ronnie," he exclaimed, "I thought that you were going to be down in Norfolk for a week! Come in. Bring your chair up to my side, so. This is one of my deaf mornings."

Granet silently obeyed. Sir Alfred glanced around the room. There was no possible hiding-place, not the slightest chance of being overheard.

"What about it, Ronnie?"

"We did our share," Granet answered. "Collins was there at the Dormy House Club. We got the signal and we lit the flare. They came down to within two or three hundred feet, and they must have thrown twenty bombs, at least. They damaged the shed but missed the workshop. The house caught fire, but they managed to put that out."

"You escaped all right, I'm glad to see?"

"They got Collins," Granet said, dropping his voice almost to a whisper. "He was shot by my side. They caught me, too. I've been in a few tight corners but nothing tighter than that. Who do you think was sent down from the War Office to hold an inquiry? Thomson — that fellow Thomson!"

The banker frowned.

"Do you mean the man who is the head of the hospitals?"

"Supposed to be," Granet answered grimly. "I

am beginning to wonder — Tell me, you haven't heard anything more about him, have you?"

"Not a word," Sir Alfred replied. "Why should I?"

"Nothing except that I have an uncomfortable feeling about him," Granet went on. "I wish I felt sure that he was just what he professes to be. He is the one man who seems to suspect me. If it hadn't been for Isabel Worth, I was done for — finished — down at that wretched hole! He had me where I couldn't move. The girl lied and got me out of it."

Sir Alfred drummed for a moment with his fingers upon the table.

"I am not sure that these risks are worth while for you, Ronnie," he said.

The young man shrugged his shoulders. His face certainly seemed to have grown thinner during the last few days.

"I don't mind it so much abroad," he declared. "It seems a different thing there, somehow. But over here it's all wrong; it's the atmosphere, I suppose. And that fellow Thomson means mischief — I'm sure of it."

"Is there any reason for ill-feeling between you two?" the banker inquired.

Granet nodded.

"You've hit it, sir."

"Miss Conyers, eh?"

The young man's face underwent a sudden change.

"Yes," he confessed. "If I hadn't begun this, if I hadn't gone so far into it that no other course was

possible, I think that I should have been content to be just what I seem to be — because of her."

Sir Alfred leaned back in his chair. He was looking at his nephew as a man of science might have looked at some interesting specimen.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you simply confirm the experience of the ages, but, frankly, you amaze me. You are moving amongst the big places of life, you are with those who are making history, and you would be content to give the whole thing up. For what? You would become a commonplace, easy-going young animal of a British soldier, for the sake of the affection of a good-looking, well-bred, commonplace British young woman. I don't understand you, Ronald. You have the blood of empire-makers in your veins. Your education and environment have developed an outward resemblance to the thing you profess to be, but behind — don't you feel the grip of the other things?"

"I feel them, right enough," Granet replied. "I have felt them for the last seven or eight years. But I am feeling something else, too, something which I dare say you never felt, something which I have never quite believed in."

Sir Alfred leaned back in his chair.

"In a way," he admitted, "this is disappointing. You are right. I have never felt the call of those other things. When I was a young man, I was frivolous simply when I felt inclined to turn from the big things of life for purposes of relaxation. When an alliance was suggested to me, I was content to accept it, but thank heavens I have been Oriental

enough to keep women in my life where they belong. I am disappointed in you, Ronnie."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't flinched," he said.

"No, but the soft spot's there," was the grim reply. "However, let that go. Tell me why you came up? Wasn't it better to have stayed down at Brancaster for a little longer?"

"Perhaps," his nephew assented. "My arm came on a little rocky and I had to chuck golf. Apart from that, I wasn't altogether comfortable about things at Market Burnham. I was obliged to tell Thomson that I saw nothing of Collins that night but they know at the Dormy House Club that he started with me in the car and has never been heard of since. Then there was the young woman."

"Saved you by a lie, didn't she?" the banker remarked. "That may be awkward later on."

"I'm sick of my own affairs," Granet declared gloomily. "Is there anything fresh up here at all?"

Sir Alfred frowned slightly.

"Nothing very much," he said. "At the same time, there are distinct indications of a change which I don't like. With certain statesmen here at the top of the tree, it was perfectly easy for me to carry out any schemes which I thought necessary. During the last few weeks, however, there has been a change. Nominally, things are the same. Actually, I seem to find another hand at work, another hand which works with the censorship, too. One of my very trusted agents in Harwich made the slightest slip the other day. A few weeks ago, he would either have been

fined twenty pounds or interned. Do you know what happened to him on Wednesday? Of course you don't. He was arrested at one o'clock and shot in half an hour. Then you saw the papers this morning? All sailings between here and a certain little spot we know of have been stopped without a moment's warning. I am compelled to pause in several most interesting schemes."

"Nothing for me, I suppose?" Granet asked, a little nervously.

Sir Alfred looked at him.

"Not for the moment," he replied, "but there will be very soon. Take hold of yourself, Ronnie. Don't look downwards so much. You and I are walking in the clouds. It is almost as bad to falter as to slip. Confess — you've been afraid."

"I have," Granet admitted, "not afraid of death but afraid of what might follow upon discovery. I am half inclined, if just one thing in the world came my way, to sail for New York to-morrow and start again."

"When those fears come to you," Sir Alfred continued slowly, "consider me. I run a greater risk than you. There are threads from this office stretching to many corners of England, to many corners of America, to most cities of Europe. If a man with brains should seize upon any one of them, he might follow it backwards — even here."

Sir Alfred touched his chest for a moment. Then his hand dropped to his side and he proceeded.

"For twenty-eight years I have ruled the money-markets of the world. No Cabinet Council is held in

this country at which my influence is not represented. The Ministers come to me one by one for help and advice. I represent the third great force of war, and there isn't a single member of the present Government who doesn't look upon me as the most important person in the country. Yet I, too, have enemies, Ronnie. There is the halfpenny Press. They'd give a million for the chance that may come at any day. They'd print my downfall in blacker lines than the declaration of war. They'd shriek over my ruin with a more brazen-throated triumph even than they would greet the heralds of peace. And the threads are there, Ronald. Sometimes I feel one shiver a little. Sometimes I have to stretch out my arm and brush too curious an inquirer into the place where curiosity ends. I sit and watch and I am well served. There are men this morning at Buckingham Palace with a V. C. to be pinned upon their breast, who faced dangers for ten minutes, less than I face day and night."

Granet rose to his feet.

"For a moment," he exclaimed, "I had forgotten! . . . Tell me," he added, with sudden vigour, "what have we done it for? You made your great name in England, you were Eton and Oxford. Why is it that when the giant struggle comes it should be Germany who governs your heart, it should be Germany who calls even to me?"

Sir Alfred held out his hand. His eye had caught the clock.

"Ronnie," he said, "have you ever wondered why in a flock of sheep every lamb knows its mother? Germany was the mother of our stock. Birth, life

and education count for nothing when the great days come, when the mother voice speaks. It isn't that we are false to England, it is that we are true to our own. You must go now, Ronnie! I have an appointment."

Granet walked out to the street a little dazed, and called for a taxi.

"I suppose that must be it," he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XXV

Geraldine welcomed her unexpected visitor that afternoon cordially enough but a little shyly.

"I thought that you were going to stay at Brancaster for a week," she remarked, as they shook hands.

"We meant to stay longer," Granet admitted, "but things went a little wrong. First of all there was this Zeppelin raid. Then my arm didn't go very well. Altogether our little excursion fizzled out and I came back last night."

"Did you see anything of the raid?" Geraldine inquired eagerly.

"Rather more than I wanted," he answered grimly. "I was motoring along the road at the time, and I had to attend a perfect court martial next day, with your friend Thomson in the chair. Can you tell me, Miss Conyers," he continued, watching her closely, "how it is that a medical major who is inspector of hospitals, should be sent down from the War Office to hold an inquiry upon that raid?"

"Was Hugh really there?" she asked in a puzzled manner.

"He was, and very officially," Granet replied. "If it weren't that I had conclusive evidence to prove what I was doing there, he seemed rather set on getting me into trouble."

"Hugh is always very fair," she said a little coldly.

"You can't solve my puzzle for me, then?" he persisted.

"What puzzle?"

"Why an inspector of hospitals should hold an inquiry upon a Zeppelin raid?"

"I'm afraid I cannot," she admitted. "Hugh certainly seems to have become a most mysterious person, but then, as you know, I haven't seen quite so much of him lately. Your change, Captain Granet, doesn't seem to have done you much good. Has your wound been troubling you?"

He rose abruptly and stood before her.

"Do you care whether my wound is troubling me or not?" he asked. "Do you care anything at all about me?"

There was a moment's silence.

"I care very much," she confessed.

He seemed suddenly a changed person. The lines which had certainly appeared in his face during the last few days, became more noticeable. He leaned towards her eagerly.

"Miss Conyers," he went on, "Geraldine, I want you to care — enough for the big things. Don't interrupt me, please. Listen to what I have to say. Somehow or other, the world has gone amiss with me lately. They won't have me back, my place has been filled up, I can't get any fighting. They've shelved me at the War Office; they talk about a home adjutancy. I can't stick it, I have lived amongst the big things too long. I'm sick of waiting about, do-

ing nothing — sick to death. I want to get away. There's some work I could do in America. You understand?"

"Not in the least," Geraldine told him frankly.

"It's my fault," he declared. "The words all seem to be tumbling out anyhow and I don't know how to put them in the right order. Can't you see that I love you, Geraldine? I want you to be my wife, and I want to get right away as quickly as ever I can. Why not America? Why couldn't we be married this week and get away from everybody?"

She looked at him in sheer amazement, amazement tempered just a little with a sort of tremulous uncertainty.

"But, Captain Granet," she exclaimed, "you can't be serious! You couldn't possibly think of leaving England now."

"Why not?" he protested. "They won't let me fight again. I couldn't stand the miserable routine of home soldiering. I'd like to get away and forget it all."

"I am sure you are not in earnest," she said quietly. "No Englishman could feel like that."

"He could if he cared for you," Granet insisted. "I'm afraid of everything here, afraid that Thomson will come back and take you away, afraid of all sorts of hideous things happening during the next few months."

"You mustn't talk like this, please," she begged. "You know as well as I do that neither you nor I could turn our backs on England just now and be happy."

He opened his lips to speak but stopped short. It was obvious that she was deeply in earnest.

"And as for the other thing you spoke of," she continued, "please won't you do as I beg you and not refer to it again for the present? Perhaps," she added, "when the war is over we may speak of it, but just now everything is so confused. I, too, seem to have lost my bearings. . . . You know that I am going out to Boulogne in a few days with Lady Headley's hospital? Don't look so frightened. I am not an amateur nurse, I can assure you. I have all my certificates."

"To Boulogne?" he muttered. "You are going to leave London?"

She nodded.

"Major Thomson arranged it for me, a few days ago. We may meet there at any time," she added, smiling. "I am perfectly certain that the War Office will find you something abroad very soon."

For a moment that queer look of boyish strength which had first attracted her, reasserted itself. His teeth came together.

"Yes," he agreed, "there's work for me somewhere. I'll find it. Only —"

She checked him hurriedly.

"And I am quite sure," she interrupted, "that when you are yourself again you will agree with me. These are not the times for us to have any selfish thoughts, are they?"

"Until a few weeks ago," he told her, "I thought of nothing but the war and my work in it — until you came, that is."

She held out her hands to check him. Her eyes were eloquent.

"Please remember," she begged, "that it is too soon. I can't bear to have you talk to me like that. Afterwards —"

"There will be no afterwards for me!" he exclaimed bitterly.

A shade of surprise became mingled with her agitation.

"You mustn't talk like that," she protested, "you with your splendid courage and opportunities! Think what you have done already. England wants the best of her sons to-day. Can't you be content to give that and to wait? We have so much gratitude in our hearts, we weak women, for those who are fighting our battle."

Her words failed to inspire him. He took her hand and lifted her fingers deliberately to his lips.

"I was foolish," he groaned, "to think that you could feel as I do. Good-bye!"

Geraldine was alone when her mother came into the room a few minutes later. Lady Conyers was looking a little fluttered and anxious.

"Was that Captain Granet?" she asked.

Geraldine nodded. Lady Conyers' anxiety deepened.

"Well?"

"I have sent him away," Geraldine said quietly, "until the end of the war."

Granet brought his car to a standstill outside the portals of that very august club in Pall Mall. The

hall-porter took in his name and in a few minutes his uncle joined him in the strangers' room.

"Back again so soon, Ronnie?"

Granet nodded.

"America's off," he announced shortly. "I thought I'd better let you know. It must be the whole thing now."

Sir Alfred was silent for a moment.

"Very well," he said at last, "only remember this, my boy — there must be no more risks. You've been sailing quite close enough to the wind."

"Did you call at the War Office?" Granet asked quickly.

His uncle assented.

"I did and I saw General Brice. He admitted in confidence that they weren't very keen about your rejoining. Nothing personal," he went on quickly, "nothing serious, that is to say. There is a sort of impression out there that you've brought them bad luck."

Granet shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "they know their own business best. What I am afraid of is being saddled with some rotten home duty."

"You need not be afraid of that any more, Ronnie," his uncle told him calmly.

Granet turned quickly around.

"Do you mean that they don't want to give me anything at all?" he demanded anxiously.

Sir Alfred shook his head.

"You are too impetuous, Ronnie. They're willing enough to give you a home command, but I have

asked that it should be left over for a little time, so as to leave you free."

"You have something in your mind, then — something definite?"

Sir Alfred looked out of the window for a moment. Then he laid his hand upon his nephew's shoulder.

"I think I can promise you, Ronnie," he said seriously, "that before many days have passed you shall have all the occupation you want."

CHAPTER XXVI

Surgeon-Major Thomson reeled for a moment and caught at the paling by his side. Then he recovered himself almost as quickly, and, leaning forward, gazed eagerly at the long, grey racing-car which was already passing Buckingham Palace and almost out of sight in the slight morning fog. There was a very small cloud of white smoke drifting away into space, and a faint smell of gunpowder in the air. He felt his cheek and, withdrawing his fingers, gazed at them with a little nervous laugh — they were wet with blood.

He looked up and down the broad pathway. For nine o'clock in the morning the Birdcage Walk was marvellously deserted. A girl, however, who had been driving a small car very slowly on the other side of the road, suddenly swung across, drew up by the kerb and leaned towards him.

"Hugh — Major Thomson, what is the matter with you?"

He dabbed his cheek with his pocket handkerchief.

"Nothing," he answered simply.

"Don't be silly!" she exclaimed. "I felt certain that I heard a shot just now, and I saw you reel and spin round for a moment. And your cheek, too — it's all over blood!"

He smiled.

"A bullet did come my way and just graze my cheek," he admitted. "Most extraordinary thing. I wonder whether one of those fellows in the Park had an accident with his rifle."

He glanced thoughtfully across towards where a number of khaki-clad figures were dimly visible behind the railings. Geraldine looked at him severely.

"Of course," she began, "if you really think that I don't know the difference between the report of a pistol and a rifle shot — "

He interrupted her.

"I was wrong," he confessed. "Forgive me. You see, my head was a little turned. Some one did deliberately fire at me, and I believe it was from a grey racing-car. I couldn't see who was driving it and it was out of sight almost at once."

"But I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "Why on earth should they fire at you? You haven't any enemies, have you?"

"Not that I know of," he assured her.

She stepped from the car and came lightly over to his side.

"Take your handkerchief away," she ordered. "Don't be foolish. You forget that I am a certificated nurse."

He raised his handkerchief and she looked for a moment at the long scar. Her face grew serious.

"Another half-inch," she murmured, — "Hugh, what an abominable thing! A deliberate attempt at murder here, at nine o'clock in the morning, in the Park! I can't understand it."

"Well, I've been under fire before," he remarked, smiling.

"Get into my car at once," she directed. "I'll drive you to a chemist's and put something on that. You can't go about as you are, and it will have healed up then in a day or two."

He obeyed at once and she drove off.

"Of course, I'm a little bewildered about it still," she went on. "I suppose you ought to go to the police-station. It was really a deliberate attempt at assassination, wasn't it? If you had been — "

She paused and he completed her sentence with a humourous twinkle in his eyes.

"If I had been a person of importance, eh? Well, you see, even I must have been in somebody's way."

She drove in silence for some little distance.

"Hugh," she asked abruptly, "why did the War Office send you down to Market Burnham after that Zeppelin raid? "

His face was suddenly immovable. He turned his head very slightly.

"Did Granet tell you that? "

She nodded.

"Captain Granet came to see me yesterday afternoon. He seemed as much surprised as I was. You were a little hard on him, weren't you? "

"I think not! "

"But why were you sent down? " she persisted. "I can't imagine what you have to do with a Zeppelin raid."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I really don't think it is worth while your bothering about the bandage," he said.

"Hugh, you make me so angry!" she exclaimed. "Of course, you may say that I haven't the right to ask, but still I can't see why you should be so mysterious. . . . Here's the chemist's. Now come inside with me, please."

He followed her obediently into the shop at the top of Trafalgar Square. She dressed his wound deftly and adjusted a bandage around his head.

"If you keep that on all day," she said, "I think — but I forgot. I was treating you like an ordinary patient. Don't laugh at me, sir. I am sure none of your professional nurses could have tied that up any better."

"Of course they couldn't," he agreed. "By-the-bye, have you obtained your papers for Boulogne yet?"

"I expect to be going next week. Lady Headley promised to let me know this afternoon. Now I'll take you down to the War Office, if you like."

He took his place once more by her side.

"Hugh," she inquired, "have you any idea who fired that shot?"

"None whatever," he replied, "no definite idea, that is to say. It was some one who was driving a low, grey car. Do we know any one who possesses such a thing?"

She frowned. The exigencies of the traffic prevented her glancing towards him.

"Only Captain Granet," she remarked, "and I suppose even your dislike of him doesn't go so far as

to suggest that he is likely to play the would-be murderer in broad daylight."

"It certainly does seem a rather rash and unnecessary proceeding," he assented, "but the fact remains that some one thought it worth while."

"Some one with a grudge against the Chief Inspector of Hospitals," she observed drily.

He did not reply. They drew up outside the War Office.

"Thank you very much," he said, "for playing the Good Samaritan."

She made a little grimace. Suddenly her manner became more earnest. She laid her fingers upon his arm as he stood on the pavement by her side.

"Hugh," she said, "before you go let me tell you something. I think that the real reason why I lost some of my affection for you was because you persisted in treating me without any confidence at all. The little things which may have happened to you abroad, the little details of your life, the harmless side of your profession — there were so many things I should have been interested in. And you told me nothing. There were things which seemed to demand an explanation with regard to your position. You ignored them. You seemed to enjoy moving in a mysterious atmosphere. It's worse than ever now. I am intelligent, am I not — trustworthy?"

"You are both," he admitted gravely. "Thank you very much for telling me this, Geraldine."

"You still have nothing to say to me?" she asked, looking him in the face.

"Nothing," he replied.

She nodded, slipped in her clutch and drove off. Surgeon-Major Thomson entered the War Office and made his way up many stairs and along many wide corridors to a large room on the top floor of the building. Two men were seated at desks, writing. He passed them by with a little greeting and entered an inner apartment. A pile of letters stood upon his desk. He examined them one by one, destroyed some, made pencil remarks upon others. Presently there was a tap at the door and Ambrose entered.

"Chief's compliments and he would be glad if you would step round to his room at once, sir," he announced.

Thomson locked his desk, made his way to the further end of the building and was admitted through a door by which a sentry was standing, to an anteroom in which a dozen people were waiting. His guide passed him through to an inner apartment, where a man was seated alone. He glanced up at Thomson's entrance.

"Good morning, Thomson!" he said brusquely. "Sit down, please. Leave the room, Dawkes, and close the door. Thanks! Thomson, what about this request of yours?"

"I felt bound to bring the matter before you, sir," Thomson replied. "I made my application to the censor and you know the result."

The Chief swung round in his chair.

"Look here," he said, "the censor's department has instructions to afford you every possible assistance in any researches you may make. There are just twenty-four names in the United Kingdom which

have been admitted to the privileges of free correspondence. The censor has no right to touch any letters addressed to them. Sir Alfred Anselman is upon that list."

Thomson nodded gravely.

"So I have been given to understand," he remarked.

The Chief leaned back in his chair. His cold grey eyes were studying the other's face.

"Thomson," he continued, "I know that you are not a sensationalist. At the same time, this request of yours is a little nerve-shattering, isn't it? Sir Alfred Anselman has been the Chancellor's right-hand man. It was mainly owing to his efforts that the war loan was such a success. He has done more for us in the city than any other Englishman. He has given large sums to the various war funds, his nephew is a very distinguished young officer. Now there suddenly comes a request from you to have the censor pass you copies of all his Dutch correspondence. There'd be the very devil to pay if I consented."

Thomson cleared his throat for a moment.

"Sir," he said, "you and I have discussed this matter indirectly more than once. You are not yet of my opinion but you will be. The halfpenny Press has sickened us so with the subject of spies that the man who groans about espionage to-day is avoided like a pestilence. Yet it is my impression that there is in London, undetected and unsuspected, a marvellous system of German espionage, a company of men who have sold themselves to the enemy, whose names

we should have considered above reproach. It is my job to sift this matter to the bottom. I can only do so if you will give me supreme power over the censorship."

"Look here, Thomson," the Chief demanded, "you don't suspect Sir Alfred Anselman?"

"I do, sir!"

The Chief was obviously dumbfounded. He sat, for a few moments, thinking.

"You're a sane man, too, Thomson," he muttered, "but it's the most astounding charge I've ever heard."

"It's the most astounding conspiracy," Thomson replied. "I was in Germany a few weeks ago, as you know."

"I heard all about it. A very brilliant but a very dangerous exploit, that of yours, Thomson."

"I will tell you my impressions, sir," the latter continued. "The ignorance displayed in the German newspapers about England is entirely a matter of censorship. Their actual information as regards every detail of our military condition is simply amazing. They know exactly what munitions are reaching our shores from abroad, they know how we are paying for them, they know exactly our financial condition, they know all about our new guns, they know just how many men we could send over to France to-morrow and how many we could get through in three months' time. They know the private views of every one of the Cabinet Ministers. They knew in Berlin yesterday what took place at the Cabinet Council the day before. You must real-

ise yourself that some of this is true. How does the information get through? "

"There are spies, of course," the Chief admitted. "The ordinary spy could make no such reports as the Germans are getting hour by hour. If I am to make a success of my job, I want the letters of Sir Alfred Anselman."

The Chief considered for several moments. Then he wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper.

"There'll be the perfect devil to pay," he said simply. "We shall have Cabinet Ministers running about the place like black beetles. What's the matter with your head? "

"I was shot at in the Park," Thomson explained. "A man had a flying go at me from a motor-car."

"Was he caught? "

Thomson shook his head.

"I didn't try," he replied. "I want him at liberty. His time will come when I break up this conspiracy, if I do it at all."

The Chief looked a little aggrieved.

"No one's even let off a pop-gun at me," he grumbled. "They must think you're the more dangerous of the two, Thomson. You'd better do what you can with that order as soon as possible. No telling how soon I may have to rescind it."

Thomson took the hint and departed. He walked quickly back to his room, thrust the order he had received into an envelope, and sent it round to the Censor's Department.

CHAPTER XXVII

Mr. Gordon Jones, who had moved his chair a little closer to his host's side, looked reflectively around the dining-room as he sipped his port. The butler remained on sufferance because of his grey hairs, but the footmen, who had been rather a feature of the Anselman establishment, had departed, and their places had been filled by half a dozen of the smartest of parlourmaids, one or two of whom were still in evidence.

"Yours is certainly one of the most patriotic households, Sir Alfred, which I have entered," he declared. "Tell me again, how many servants have you sent to the war?"

Sir Alfred smiled with the air of one a little proud of his record.

"Four footmen and two chauffeurs from here, eleven gardeners and three indoor servants from the country," he replied. "That is to say nothing about the farms, where I have left matters in the hands of my agents. I am paying the full wages to every one of them."

"And thank heavens you'll still have to pay us a little super-tax," the Cabinet Minister remarked, smiling.

Sir Alfred found nothing to dismay him in the prospect.

"You shall have every penny of it, my friend," he promised. "I have taken a quarter of a million of your war loan and I shall take the same amount of your next one. I spend all my time upon your committees, my own affairs scarcely interest me, and yet I thought to-day, when my car was stopped to let a company of the London Regiment march down to Charing-Cross, that there wasn't one of those khaki-clad young men who wasn't offering more than I."

The Bishop leaned forward from his place.

"Those are noteworthy words of yours, Sir Alfred," he said. "There is nothing in the whole world so utterly ineffective as our own passionate gratitude must seem to ourselves when we think of all those young fellows — not soldiers, you know, but young men of peace, fond of their pleasures, their games, their sweethearts, their work — throwing it all on one side, passing into another life, passing into the valley of shadows. I, too, have seen those young men, Sir Alfred."

The conversation became general. The host of this little dinner-party leaned back in his place for a moment, engrossed in thought. It was a very distinguished, if not a large company. There were three Cabinet Ministers, a high official in the War Office, a bishop, a soldier of royal blood back for a few days from the Front, and his own nephew — Granet. He sat and looked round at them and a queer little smile played upon his lips. If only the truth were known, the world had never seen a stranger gathering. It was a company which the King himself might have been proud to gather

around him; serious, representative Englishmen — Englishmen, too, of great position. There was not one of them who had not readily accepted his invitation, there was not one of them who was not proud to sit at his table, there was not one of them who did not look upon him as one of the props of the Empire.

There was a little rustle as one of the new parlourmaids walked smoothly to his side and presented a silver salver. He took the single letter from her, glanced at it for a moment carelessly and then felt as though the fingers which held it had been pierced by red-hot wires. The brilliant little company seemed suddenly to dissolve before his eyes. He saw nothing but the marking upon that letter, growing larger and larger as he gazed, the veritable writing of fate pressed upon the envelope by a rubber stamp — by the hand, perchance, of a clerk — "Opened by Censor."

There was a momentary singing in his ears. He looked at his glass, found it full, raised it to his lips and drained it. The ghastly moment of suspended animation passed. He felt no longer that he was in a room from which all the air had been drawn. He was himself again but the letter was there. Mr. Gordon Jones, who had been talking to the bishop, leaned towards him and pointed to the envelope.

"Is that yours, Sir Alfred?" he asked.

Sir Alfred nodded.

"Becoming a little more stringent, I see," he observed, holding it up.

"I thought I recognised the mark," the other replied. "A most outrageous mistake! I am very

glad that it came under my notice. You are absolutely free from the censor, Sir Alfred."

"I thought so myself," Sir Alfred remarked. "However, I suppose an occasional mistake can scarcely be wondered at. Don't worry them about it, please. My Dutch letters are simply records of the balances at my different banks, mere financial details."

"All the same," Mr. Gordon Jones insisted, "there has been gross neglect somewhere. I will see that it is inquired into to-morrow morning."

"Very kind of you," Sir Alfred declared. "As you know, I have been able to give you fragments of information now and then which would cease at once, of course, if my correspondence as a whole were subject to censorship. An occasional mistake like this is nothing."

There was another interruption. This time a message had come from the House — Ministers would be required within the next twenty minutes. The little party — it was a men's dinner-party only — broke up. Very soon Sir Alfred and his nephew were left alone. Sir Alfred's fingers shook for a moment as he tore open the seal of his letter. He glanced through the few lines it contained and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Come this way, Ronnie," he invited.

They left the dining-room and, eschewing the inviting luxuries of the billiard room and library, passed into a small room behind, plainly furnished as a business man's study. Granet seized his uncle by the arm.

"It's coded, I suppose?"

Sir Alfred nodded.

"It's coded, Ronnie, and between you and me I don't believe they'll be able to read it, but whose doing is that?" he added, pointing with his finger to the envelope.

"It must have been a mistake," Granet muttered.

Sir Alfred glanced towards the closed door. Without a doubt they were alone.

"I don't know," he said. "Mistakes of this sort don't often occur. As I looked around to-night, Ronnie, I thought — I couldn't help thinking that our position was somewhat wonderful. Does it mean that this is the first breath of suspicion, I wonder? Was it really only my fancy, or did I hear to-night the first mutterings of the storm?"

"No one can possibly suspect," Granet declared, "no one who could have influence enough to override your immunity from censorship. It must have been an accident."

"I wonder!" Sir Alfred muttered.

"Can't you decode it?" Granet asked eagerly. "There may be news."

Sir Alfred re-entered the larger library and was absent for several minutes. When he returned, the message was written out in lead pencil: —

Leave London June 4th. Have flares midnight Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's steps, gardens in front of Savoy. Your last report received.

Granet glanced eagerly back at the original message. It consisted of a few perfectly harmless sen-

tences concerning various rates of exchange. He gave it to his uncle with a smile.

"I shouldn't worry about that, sir," he advised.

"It isn't the thing itself I worry about," Sir Alfred said thoughtfully, — "they'll never decode that message. It's the something that lies behind it. It's the pointing finger, Ronnie. I thought we'd last it out, at any rate. Things look different now. You're serious, I suppose? You don't want to go to America?"

"I don't," Granet replied grimly. "That's all finished, for the present. You know very well what it is I do want."

Sir Alfred frowned.

"There are plenty of wild enterprises afoot," he admitted, "but I don't know, after all, that I wish you particularly to be mixed up in them."

"I can't hang about here much longer," his nephew grumbled. "I get the fever in my blood to be doing something. I had a try this morning."

His uncle looked at him for a moment.

"This morning," he repeated. "Well?"

Granet thrust his hands into his trousers pockets. There was a frown upon his fine forehead.

"It's that man I told you about," he said bitterly, — "the man I hate. He's nobody of any account but he always seems to be mixed up in any little trouble I find myself in. I got out of that affair down at Market Burnham without the least trouble, and then, as you know, the War Office sent him down, of all the people on earth, to hold an inquiry. Sometimes I think that he suspects me. I met him

at a critical moment on the battlefield near Niemen. I always believed that he heard me speaking German — it was just after I had come back across the lines. The other day — well, I told you about that. Isabel Worth saved me or I don't know where I should have been. I think I shall kill that man!"

"What did you say his name was?" Sir Alfred asked, with sudden eagerness.

"Thomson."

There was a moment's silence. Sir Alfred's expression was curiously tense. He leaned across the table towards his nephew.

"Thomson?" he repeated. "My God! I knew there was something I meant to tell you. Don't you know, Ronnie? — but of course you don't. You're sure it's Thomson — Surgeon-Major Thomson?"

"That's the man."

"He is the man with the new post," Sir Alfred declared hoarsely. "He is the head of the whole Military Intelligence Department! They've set him up at the War Office. They've practically given him unlimited powers."

"Why, I thought he was inspector of Field Hospitals!" Granet gasped.

"A blind!" his uncle groaned. "He is nothing of the sort. He's Kitchener's own man, and this," he added, looking at the letter, "must be his work!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

Surgeon-Major Thomson looked up almost eagerly as Ambrose entered his room the next morning. The young man's manner was dejected and there were black lines under his eyes. He answered his chief's unspoken question by a little shake of the head.

"No luck, sir," he announced. "I spent the whole of last night at it, too — never went to bed at all. I've tried it with thirty-one codes. Then I've taken the first line or two and tried every possible change."

"I couldn't make anything of it myself," Thomson confessed, looking at the sheet of paper which even at that moment was spread out before him. "All the same, Ambrose, I don't believe in it."

"Neither do I, sir," the other assented eagerly. "I am going to have another try this afternoon. Perhaps there'll be some more letters in then and we can tell whether there's any similarity."

Thomson frowned.

"I've a sort of feeling, Ambrose," he said, "that we sha'n't have many of these letters."

"Why not, sir?"

"I heard by telephone, just before you came," Thomson announced, "that a certain very distinguished person was on his way to see me. Cabinet Ministers don't come here for nothing, and this one happens to be a friend of Sir Alfred's."

Ambrose sighed.

"More interference, sir," he groaned. "I don't see how they can expect us to run our department with the civilians butting in wherever they like. They want us to save the country and they're to have the credit for it."

There was a knock at the door. A boy scout entered. His eyes were a little protuberant, his manner betokened awe.

"Mr. Gordon Jones, sir!"

Mr. Gordon Jones entered without waiting for any further announcement. Thomson rose to his feet and received a genial handshake, after which the newcomer glanced at Ambrose. Thomson signed to his assistant to leave the room.

"Major Thomson," the Cabinet Minister began impressively, as he settled down in his chair, "I have come here to confer with you, to throw myself, to a certain extent, upon your understanding and your common sense," he added, speaking with the pleased air of a man sure of his ground and himself.

"You have come to protest, I suppose," Thomson said slowly, "against our having — "

"To protest against nothing, my dear sir," the other interrupted. "Simply to explain to you, as I have just explained to your Chief, that while we possess every sympathy with, and desire to give every latitude in the world to the military point of view, there are just one or two very small matters in which we must claim to have a voice. We have, as you know, a free censorship list. We have put no one upon it who is not far and away above all suspicion.

I am given to understand that a letter addressed to Sir Alfred Anselman was opened yesterday. I went to see your Chief about it this morning. He has referred me to you."

"The letter," Thomson remarked, "was opened by my orders."

"I happened," Mr. Gordon Jones went on, "to be dining at Sir Alfred's house when the letter was presented. Sir Alfred, I must say, took it exceedingly well. At the same time, I have made it my business to see that this does not occur again."

Thomson made no sign. His eyebrows, however, rose a little higher.

"The country," his visitor continued, "will know some day what it owes to Sir Alfred Anselman. At present I can only express, and that poorly, my sense of personal obligation to him. He has been of the greatest assistance to the Government in the city and elsewhere. His contributions to our funds have been magnificent; his advice, his sympathy, invaluable. He is a man inspired by the highest patriotic sentiments, one of the first and most noteworthy of British citizens."

Thomson listened in silence and without interruption. He met the well-satisfied peroration of his visitor without comment.

"I am hoping to hear," the latter concluded, with some slight asperity in his manner, "that the circumstance to which I have alluded was accidental and will not be repeated."

Major Thomson glanced thoughtfully at a little pile of documents by his side. Then he looked coldly

towards his visitor and provided him, perhaps, with one of the most complete surprises of his life.

"I am sorry, Mr. Gordon Jones," he said, "but this is not a matter which I can discuss with you."

The Cabinet Minister's face was a study.

"Not discuss it?" he repeated blankly.

Major Thomson shook his head.

"Certain responsibilities," he continued quietly, "with regard to the safe conduct of this country, have been handed over to the military authorities, which in this particular case I represent. We are in no position for amenities or courtesies. Our country is in the gravest danger and nothing else is of the slightest possible significance. The charge which we have accepted we shall carry out with regard to one thing only, and that is our idea of what is due to the public safety."

"You mean, in plain words," Mr. Gordon Jones exclaimed, "that no requests from me or say, for instance, the Prime Minister, would have any weight with you?"

"None whatever," Major Thomson replied coolly. "Without wishing to be in any way personal, I might say that there are statesmen in your Government, for whom you must accept a certain amount of responsibility, who have been largely instrumental in bringing this hideous danger upon the country. As a company of law-makers you may or may not be excellent people — that is, I suppose, according to one's political opinions. As a company of men competent to superintend the direction of a country at war, you must permit me to say that I consider you

have done well in placing certain matters in our hands, and that you will do better still not to interfere."

Mr. Gordon Jones sat quite still for several moments.

"Major Thomson," he said at last, "I have never heard of you before, and I am not prepared for a moment to say that I sympathise with your point of view. But it is at least refreshing to hear any one speak his mind with such frankness. I must now ask you one question, whether you choose to answer it or not. The letter which you have opened, addressed to Sir Alfred — you couldn't possibly find any fault with it?"

"It was apparently a quite harmless production," Major Thomson confessed.

"Do you propose to open any more?"

Thomson shook his head.

"That is within our discretion, sir."

Mr. Gordon Jones struggled with his obvious annoyance.

"Look here," he said, with an attempt at good-humour, "you can at least abandon the official attitude for a moment with me. Tell me why, of all men in the world, you have chosen to suspect Sir Alfred Anselman?"

"I am sorry," Thomson replied stiffly, "but this is not a matter which I can discuss in any other way except officially, and I do not recognise you as having any special claims for information."

The Minister rose to his feet. Those few minutes marked to him an era in his official life.

"You are adopting an attitude, sir," he said, "which, however much I may admire it from one point of view, seems to me scarcely to take into account the facts of the situation."

Thomson made no reply. He had risen to his feet. His manner clearly indicated that he considered the interview at an end. Mr. Gordon Jones choked down his displeasure.

"When you are wanting a civil job, Major Thomson," he concluded, "come and give us a call. Good morning!"

CHAPTER XXIX

"A lady to see you, sir," Jarvis announced discreetly.

Granet turned quickly around in his chair. Almost instinctively he pulled down the roll top of the desk before which he was seated. Then he rose to his feet and held out his hand. He managed with an effort to conceal the consternation which had succeeded his first impulse of surprise.

"Miss Worth!" he exclaimed.

She came towards him confidently, her hands outstretched, slim, dressed in sober black, her cheeks as pale as ever, her eyes a little more brilliant. She threw her muff into a chair and a moment afterwards sank into it herself.

"You have been expecting me?" she asked eagerly.

Granet was a little taken aback.

"I have been hoping to hear from you," he said. "You told me, if you remember, not to write."

"It was better not," she assented. "Even after you left I had a great deal of trouble. That odious man, Major Thomson, put me through a regular cross-examination again, and I had to tell him at last —"

"What?" Granet exclaimed anxiously.

"That we were engaged to be married," she confessed. "There was really no other way out of it."

"That we were engaged," Granet repeated blankly.

She nodded.

"He pressed me very hard," she went on, "and I am afraid I made some admissions — well, they were necessary — which, to say the least of it, were compromising. There was only one way out of it decently for me, and I took it. You don't mind?"

"Of course not," he replied.

"There was father to be considered," she went on. "He was furious at first — "

"You told your father?" he interrupted.

"I had to," she explained, smoothing her muff. "He was there all the time that Thomson man was cross-examining me."

"Then your father believes in our engagement, too?"

"He does," she answered drily, "or I am afraid you would have heard a little more from Major Thomson before now. Ever since that night, father has been quite impossible to live with. He says he has to begin a part of his work all over again."

"The bombs really did do some damage, then?" he asked.

She nodded, looking at him for a moment curiously.

"Yes," she acknowledged, "they did more harm than any one knows. The place is like a fortress now. They say that if they can find the other man who helped to light that flare, he will be shot in five minutes."

Granet, who had been standing with his elbow upon the mantelpiece, leaned over and took a cigarette from a box.

"Then, for his sake, let us hope that they do not find him," he remarked.

"And ours," she said softly.

Granet stood and looked at her steadfastly, the match burning in his fingers. Then he threw it away and lit another. The interval had been full of unadmitted tension, which suddenly passed.

"Shall you think I am horribly greedy," she asked, "if I say that I should like something to eat? I am dying of hunger."

Granet for a moment was startled. Then he moved towards the bell.

"How absurd of me!" he exclaimed. "Of course, you have just come up, haven't you?"

"I have come straight from the station here," she replied.

He paused.

"Where are you staying, then?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know yet," she admitted.

"You don't know?" he repeated.

She met his gaze without flinching. There was a little spot of colour in her cheeks, however, and her lips quivered.

"You see," she explained, "things became absolutely impossible for me at Market Burnham. I won't say that they disbelieved me — not my father, at any rate — but he seems to think that it was somehow my fault — that if you hadn't been there

that night the thing wouldn't have happened. I am watched the whole of the time, in fact not a soul has said a civil word to me — since you left. I just couldn't stand it any longer. I packed up this morning and I came away without saying a word to any one."

Granet glanced at the clock. It was a quarter past ten.

"Well, the first thing to do is to get you something to eat," he said, ringing the bell. "Do you mind having something here or would you like to go to a restaurant?"

"I should much prefer having it here," she declared. "I am not fit to go anywhere, and I am tired."

He rang the bell and gave Jarvis a few orders. The girl stood up before the glass, took off her hat and smoothed her hair with her hands. She had the air of being absolutely at home.

"Did you come up without any luggage at all?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I have a dressing-bag and a few things downstairs on a taxicab," she said. "I told the man to stop his engine and wait for a time — until I had seen you," she added, turning around.

There was a very slight smile upon her lips, the glimmer of something that was almost appealing, in her eyes. Granet took her hand and patted it kindly. Her response was almost hysterical.

"It's very sweet of you to trust me like this," he said. "Jarvis will bring you in something to eat,

then I'll take you round to your aunt's. Where is it she lives — somewhere in Kensington, isn't it? To-morrow we must talk things over."

She threw herself back once more in the easychair and glanced around her.

"I should like," she decided, "to talk them over now."

He glanced towards the door.

"Just as you please," he said, "only Jarvis will be in with your sandwiches directly."

She brushed aside his protest.

"I was obliged," she continued, "to say that I was engaged to you, to save you from something — I don't know what. The more I have thought about it, the more terrible it has all seemed. I am not going to even ask you for any explanation. I — I daren't."

Granet looked at his cigarette for a moment thoughtfully. Then he threw it into the fire.

"Perhaps you are wise," he said coolly. "All the same, when the time comes there is an explanation."

"It is the present which has become such a problem," she went on. "I was driven to leave home and I don't think I can go back again. Father is simply furious with me, and every one about the place seems to have an idea that I am somehow to blame for what happened the other night."

"That seems to me a little unjust," he protested.

"It isn't unjust at all," she replied brusquely. "I've told them all lies and I've got to pay for them. I came to you — well, there really wasn't anything else left for me to do, was there? I hope you don't

think that I am horribly forward. I am quite willing to admit that I like you, that I liked you from the first moment we met at Lady Anselman's luncheon. At the same time, if that awful night hadn't changed everything, I should have behaved just like any other stupidly and properly brought-up young woman — waited and hoped and made an idiot of myself whenever you were around, and in the end, I suppose, been disappointed. You see, fate has rather changed that. I had to invent our engagement to save you — and here I am," she added, with a little nervous laugh, turning her head as the door opened.

Jarvis entered with the sandwiches and arranged them on a small table by her side. Granet poured out the wine for her, mixed himself a whiskey-and-soda and took a sandwich also from the plate.

"Now tell me," he began, as soon as Jarvis had disappeared, "what is there at the back of your mind about my presence there at Market Burnham that night?"

She laid down her sandwich. For the first time her voice trembled. Granet realised that beneath all this quietness of demeanour a volcano was threatening.

"I have told you that I do not want to think of that night," she said firmly. "I simply do not understand."

"You have something in your mind?" he persisted. "You don't believe, really, that that man Collins, who was found shot — "

She glanced at the door.

"I couldn't sleep that night," she interrupted.

"I heard your car arrive, I saw you both together, you and the man who was shot. I saw — more than that. I hadn't meant to tell you this but perhaps it is best. I ask you for no explanation. You see, I am something of an individualist. I just want one thing, and about the rest I simply don't care. To me, to myself, to my own future, to my own happiness the rest is very slight, and I never pretend to be anything else but a very selfish person. Only you know now that I have lied, badly."

"I understand," he said. "Finish your sandwiches and I will take you to your aunt's. To-morrow I will write to your father."

She drew a little sigh.

"I will do whatever you say," she agreed, "only — please look at me."

He stooped down a little. She seized his wrists, her voice was suddenly hoarse.

"You weren't pretending altogether?" she pleaded. "Don't make me feel a perfect beast. You did care a little? You weren't just talking nonsense?"

She would have drawn him further down but he kept away.

"Listen," he said, "when I tell you that I am going to write to your father to-morrow, you know what that means. For the rest, I must think. Perhaps this is the only way out. Of course, I like you but the truth is best, isn't it? I hadn't any idea of this. As a matter of fact, I am rather in love with some one else."

She caught at her breath for a moment, half

closed her eyes as though to shut out something disagreeable.

"I don't care," she muttered. "You see how low I have fallen — I'll bear even that. Come," she added, springing up, "my aunt goes to bed before eleven. You can drive me down there, if you like. Are you going to kiss me?"

He bent over her a little gravely and his lips touched her forehead. She caught his face suddenly between her hands and kissed him on the lips. Then she turned towards the door.

"Of course, I am horribly ashamed," she exclaimed, "but then — well, I'm myself. Come along, please."

He followed her down into the taxi and they drove off towards Kensington.

"How long have you known the other girl?" she asked abruptly.

"Very little longer than I have known you," he answered.

She took off her glove. He felt her hand steal into his.

"You'll try and like me a little, please?" she begged. "There hasn't been any one who cared for so many years — not all my life. When I came out — ever since I came out — I have behaved just like other properly, well-brought-up girls. I've just sat and waited. I've rather avoided men than otherwise. I've sat and waited. Girls haven't liked me much. They say I'm odd. I'm twenty-eight now, you know. I haven't enjoyed the last six years. Father's wrapped up in his work. He thinks he has done his

duty if he sends me to London sometimes to stay with my aunt. She is very much like him, only she is wrapped up in missions instead of science. Neither of them seems to have time to be human."

"It must have been rotten for you," Granet said kindly.

Her hand clutched his, she came a little nearer.

"Year after year of it," she murmured. "If I had been good-looking, I should have run away and gone on the stage. If I had been clever, I should have left home and done something. But I am like millions of others — I am neither. I had to sit and wait. When I met you, I suddenly began to realise what it would be like to care for some one. I knew it wasn't any use. And then this miracle happened. I couldn't help it," she went on doggedly. "I never thought of it at first. It came to me like a great flash that the only way to save you — "

"To save me from what?" he asked.

"From being shot as a spy," she answered quickly. "There! I'm not a fool, you know. You may think I'm a fool about you but I am not about things in general. Good-bye! This is my aunt's. Don't come in. Ring me up to-morrow morning. I'll meet you anywhere. Good-bye, please! I want to run away."

He watched her go, a little dazed. A trim parlour-maid came out and, after a few words of explanation, superintended the disposal of her luggage in the hall. Then the taxicab man returned.

"Back to Sackville Street," Granet muttered.

CHAPTER XXX

Granet, on his return to Sackville Street, paid the taxicab driver, ascended the stairs and let himself into his rooms with very much the air of a man who has passed through a dream. A single glance around, however, brought him vivid realisations of his unwelcome visitor. The little plate of sandwiches, half finished, the partly emptied bottle of wine, were still there. One of her gloves lay in the corner of the easy-chair. He picked it up, drew it for a moment through his fingers, then crushed it into a ball and flung it into the fire. Jarvis, who had heard him enter, came from one of the back rooms.

"Clear these things away, Jarvis," his master ordered. "Leave the whiskey and soda and tobacco on the table. I may be late."

Jarvis silently obeyed. As soon as he was alone, Granet threw himself into the easy-chair. He was filled with a bitter sense of being entrapped. He had been a little rash at Market Burnham, perhaps, but if any other man except Thomson had been sent there, his explanations would have been accepted without a word, and all this miserable complication would have been avoided. He thought over Isabel's coming, all that she had said. She had left him no loophole. She had the air of a young woman who knew her own mind excellently well. A single word

from her to Thomson and the whole superstructure of his ingeniously built-up life might tumble to pieces. He sat with folded arms in a grim attitude of unrest, thinking bitter thoughts. They rolled into his brain like black shadows. He had been honest in the first instance. With ancestors from both countries, he had deliberately chosen the country to which he felt the greatest attachment. He remembered his long travels in Germany, he remembered on his return his growing disapproval of English slackness, her physical and moral decadence. Her faults had inspired him not with the sorrow of one of her real sons, but with the contempt of one only half bound to her by natural ties. The ground had been laid ready for the poison. He had started honestly enough. His philosophy had satisfied himself. He had felt no moral degradation in wearing the uniform of one country for the benefit of another. All this self-disgust he dated from the coming of Geraldine Conyers. Now he was weary of it all, face to face, too, with a disagreeable and insistent problem.

He started suddenly in his chair. An interruption ordinary enough, but never without a certain startling effect, had broken in upon his thoughts. The telephone on his table was ringing insistently. He rose to his feet and glanced at the clock as he crossed the room. It was five minutes past twelve. As he took up the receiver a familiar voice greeted him.

"Is that Ronnie? Yes, this is Lady Anselman. Your uncle told me to ring you up to see if you were in. He wants you to come round."

"What, to-night?"

"Do come, Ronnie," his aunt continued. "I don't suppose it's anything important but your uncle seems to want it. No, I sha'n't see you. I'm just going to bed. I have been playing bridge. I'm sure the duchess cheats — I have never won at her house in my life. I'll tell your uncle you'll come, then, Ronnie. . . . Good night!"

Granet laid down the receiver. Somehow or other, the idea of action, even at that hour of the night, was a relief to him. He called to Jarvis and gave him a few orders. Afterwards he turned out and walked through the streets — curiously lit and busy, it seemed to him — to the corner of Park Lane, and up to the great mansion fronting the Park, which had belonged to the Anselmans for two generations. There were few lights in the windows. He was admitted at once and passed on to his uncle's own servant.

"Sir Alfred is in the study, sir," the latter announced, "if you will kindly come this way."

Granet crossed the circular hall hung with wonderful tapestry, and passed through the sumptuously-furnished library into the smaller, business man's study, in which Sir Alfred spent much of his time. There were telephones upon his desk, a tape machine, and a private instrument connected with the telegraph department. There was a desk for his secretary, now vacant, and beyond, in the shadows of the apartment, winged bookcases which held a collection of editions de luxe, first editions, and a great collection of German and Russian literature, admittedly unique. Sir Alfred was sitting at his desk,

writing a letter. He greeted his nephew with his usual cheerful nod.

"Wait before you go, Harrison," he said to his valet. "Will you take anything, Ronald? There are cigars and cigarettes here but nothing to drink. Harrison, you can put the whiskey and soda on the side, anyhow, then you can wait for me in my room. I shall not require any other service to-night. Some one must stay to let Captain Granet out. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," the man replied.

"If you don't mind, Ronnie, I will finish this letter while he brings the whiskey and soda," Sir Alfred said.

Captain Granet strolled around the room. There was no sound for a moment but the scratching of Sir Alfred's quill pen across the paper. Presently Harrison returned with the whiskey and soda. Sir Alfred handed him a note.

"To be sent to-night, Harrison," he directed; "no answer."

The man withdrew, closing the door behind him. Sir Alfred listened to his footsteps across the hall. Then he rose from his place and turned on the whole of the illumination of the room. The shadows of the dark spaces were suddenly illuminated, every corner of the stately apartment was distinctly visible. Sir Alfred, with his hands in his pockets, walked slowly around. When he came back he turned out all the lights except the heavily shaded one over his desk, and motioned his nephew to draw his easy-chair up to the side.

"Well, Ronnie," he said, "I suppose you are wondering why I have sent for you at this hour of the night?"

"I am," Granet admitted frankly. "Is there any news? — anything behind the news, perhaps I should say?"

"What there is, is of no account," Sir Alfred replied. "We are going to talk pure human nature, you and I, for the next hour. The fate of empires is a matter for the historians. It is your fate and mine which just now counts for most."

"There is some trouble?" Granet asked quickly, — "some suspicion?"

"None whatever," Sir Alfred repeated firmly. "My position was never more secure than it is at this second. I am the trusted confidant of the Cabinet. I have done, not only apparently but actually, very important work for them. Financially, too, my influence as well as my resources have been of vast assistance to this country."

Granet nodded and waited. He knew enough of his uncle to be aware that he would develop his statement in his own way.

"When all has gone well," Sir Alfred continued, "when all seems absolutely peaceful and safe, it is sometimes the time to pause and consider. We are at that spot at the present moment. You have been lucky, in your way, Ronnie. Three times, whilst fighting for England, you have managed to penetrate the German lines and receive from them communications of the greatest importance. Since your return home you have been of use in various ways.

This last business in Norfolk will not be forgotten. Then take my case. What Germany knows of our financial position, our strength and our weakness, is due to me. That Germany is at the present time holding forty millions of money belonging to the city of London, is also owing to me. In a dozen other ways my influence has been felt. As I told you before, we have both, in our way, been successful, but we have reached the absolute limit of our effectiveness."

"What does that mean?" Granet asked.

"It means this," Sir Alfred explained. "When this war was started, I, with every fact and circumstance before me, with more information, perhaps, than any other man breathing, predicted peace within three months. I was wrong. Germany to-day is great and unconquered, but Germany has lost her opportunity. This may be a war of attrition, or even now the unexpected may come, but to all effects and purposes Germany is beaten."

"Do you mean this?" Granet exclaimed incredulously.

"Absolutely," his uncle assured him. "Remember that I know more than you do. There is a new and imminent danger facing the dual alliance. What it is you will learn soon enough. The war may drag on for many months but the chances of the great German triumph we have dreamed of, have passed. They know it as well as we do. I have seen the writing on the wall for months. To-day I have concluded all my arrangements. I have broken off all negotiations with Berlin. They recognise the au-

thority and they absolve me. They know that it will be well to have a friend here when the time comes for drawing up the pact."

Granet gripped the sides of his chair with his hand. It seemed to him impossible that with these few commonplace words the fate of all Europe was being pronounced.

"Do you mean that Germany will be crushed?" he demanded.

Sir Alfred shook his head.

"I still believe that impossible," he said, "but the peace of exhaustion will come, and come surely, before many months have passed. It is time for us to think of ourselves. So far as I am concerned, well, there is that one censored letter — nothing in itself, yet damning if the code should be discovered. As for you, well, you are safe from anything transpiring in France, and although you seem to have been rather unlucky there, you appear to be safe as regards Norfolk. You must make up your mind now to follow my lead. Take a home command, do the rest of your soldiering quietly, and shout with the others when the day of peace comes. These last few months must be our great secret. At heart we may have longed to call ourselves the sons of a mightier nation, but fate is against us. We must continue Englishmen."

"You've taken my breath away," Granet declared. "Let me realise this for a moment."

He sat quite still. A rush of thoughts had crowded into his brain. First and foremost was the thought of Geraldine. If he could cover up his

traces! If it were true that he was set free now from his pledges! Then he remembered his visitor of the evening and his heart sank.

"Look here," he confessed, "in a way this is a huge relief. I, like you, thought it was to last for three months and I thought I could stick it. While the excitement of the thing was about it was easy enough, but listen, uncle. That Norfolk affair — I am not really out of that."

"What do you mean?" Sir Alfred demanded anxiously. "This fellow Thomson?"

"Thomson, of course," Granet assented, "but the real trouble has come to me in a different way. I told you that the girl got me out of it. She couldn't stand the second cross-examination. She was driven into a corner, and finally, to clear herself, said that we were engaged to be married. She has come up to London, came to me to-night. She expects me to marry her."

"How much does she know?" Sir Alfred asked.

"Everything," Granet groaned. "It was she who had told me of the waterway across the marshes. She saw me there with Collins, just before the flare was lit. She knew that I lied to them when they found me."

Sir Alfred sighed.

"It's a big price, Ronnie," he said, "but you'll have to pay it. The sooner you marry the girl and close her mouth, the better."

"If it hadn't been for that damned fellow Thomson," Granet muttered, "there would never have been a suspicion."

"If it hadn't been for the same very enterprising gentleman," Sir Alfred observed, "my correspondence would never have been tampered with."

Granet leaned a little forward.

"Thomson is our one remaining danger," he said. "I have had the feeling since first he half recognised me. We met, you know, in Belgium. It was just when I was coming out of the German lines. Somehow or other he must have been on my track ever since. I took no notice of it. I thought it was simply because — because he was engaged to Geraldine Conyers."

"You are rivals in love, too, eh?" Sir Alfred remarked.

"Geraldine Conyers is the girl I want to marry," Granet admitted.

"Thomson," Sir Alfred murmured to himself, — "Surgeon-Major Hugh Thomson. He seems to be the only man, Ronnie, from whom we have the least danger to fear. Personally, I think I am secure. I do not believe that that single letter will be ever deciphered, and if it is, three-parts of the Cabinet are my friends. I could ruin the Stock Exchange tomorrow, bring London's credit, for a time, at any rate, below the credit of Belgrade."

"All the same, it seems to me," Granet declared grimly, "that we should both be more comfortable if there were no Surgeon-Major Thomson."

"The very last dispatches I had to deal with," Sir Alfred continued, "made allusion to him. They don't love some of his work in Berlin, I can tell you. What sort of a man is he, Ronnie? Can he be

bought? A hundred thousand pounds would be a fortune to a man like that."

"There is only one way of dealing with him," Granet said fiercely. "I have tried it once. I expect I'll have to try again."

Sir Alfred leaned across the table.

"Don't be rash, Ronnie," he advised. "And yet, remember this. The man is a real danger, both to you and to me. He is the only man who has had anything to do with the Intelligence Department here, who is worth a snap of the fingers. Now go home, Ronnie. You came here — well, never mind what you were when you came here. You are going back an Englishman. If they won't send you to the Front again, bother them for some work here, and stick to it. You will get no reports nor any visitors. I have strangled the whole system. You and I are cut loose from it. We are free-lances. Mind, I still believe that in the end German progress and German culture will dominate the world, but it may not be in our day. It just happens that we have struck a little too soon. Let us make the best of things, Ronnie. You have many years of life. I have some of unabated power. Let us be thankful that we were wise enough to stop in time."

Granet rose to his feet. His uncle watched him curiously.

"You're young, of course, Ronnie," he continued indulgently. "You haven't yet fitted your burden on to your shoulders properly. England or Germany, you have some of both in you. After all, it isn't a vital matter under which banner you travel. It isn't

quite like that with me. I have lived here all my life and I wouldn't care to live anywhere else, but that's because I carry my own country with me. It's English air I breathe but it's a German heart I still carry with me. Good night, Ronnie! Remember about Thomson."

The two men wrung hands and Granet made his way towards the door.

"About Thomson," he repeated to himself, as the servant conducted him towards the door.

CHAPTER XXXI

Ambrose announced a visitor, early on the following morning, with some show of interest.

"Captain Granet to see you, sir. We've a good many notes about him. Would you like the book?"

Thomson shook his head.

"Thank you," he answered drily, "I have it in my desk but I think I can remember. Is he outside now?"

"Yes, sir! He said he wouldn't keep you for more than a few minutes, if you could spare him a short interview."

"Any luck last night?"

Ambrose sighed.

"I was up till three o'clock again. Once I thought I was on the track of it. I have come to the conclusion now that it's one of those codes that depend upon shifting quantities. I shall start again to-night on a different idea. Shall I show Captain Granet in, sir?"

Thomson assented, and a few minutes later Granet entered the room. He made no attempt to shake hands or to take a seat. Thomson looked at him coldly.

"Well," he asked, abruptly, "what can I do for you?"

"I don't suppose you can do anything," Granet replied, "but I am going to spend to-day and to-morrow, too, if necessary, in this place, bothering every one I ever heard of. You have some influence, I know. Get me a job out of this country."

Thomson raised his eyebrows slightly.

"You want to go abroad again?"

"Anywhere — anyhow! If they won't have me back in France, although heaven knows why not, can I be sent to the Dardanelles, or even East Africa? I'll take out Territorials, if you like. I'll do anything sooner than be ordered to one of these infernal country towns to train young tradespeople. If I don't worry, I know I shall get a home appointment directly, and I don't want it."

Thomson studied his visitor, for a moment, carefully.

"So you want to be fighting again, eh?" he remarked.

"I do," Granet answered firmly.

Major Thomson drew a little locked book towards him, unfastened it with a key from his chain and held his hand over the page. It was noticeable that his right hand slipped open a few inches the right-hand drawer of his desk.

"You have come to me, Captain Granet," he said, "to ask my aid in getting you a job. Well, if I could give you one where I was perfectly certain that you would be shot in your first skirmish, I would give it to you, with pleasure. Under present conditions, however, it is my impression that the further you are from any British fighting force, the better it

will be for the safety and welfare of that force."

Granet's face was suddenly rigid. He had turned a little paler and his eyes flashed.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Thomson had removed his hand and was glancing at the open page.

"There are a few notes here about you," he said. "I will not read them all but I will give you some extracts. There is your full name and parentage, tracing out the amount of foreign blood which I find is in your veins. There is a verbatim account of a report made to me by your Brigadier-General, in which it seems that in the fighting under his command you were three times apparently taken prisoner, three times you apparently escaped; the information which you brought back led to at least two disasters; the information which exactly at the time you were absent seemed to come miraculously into the hands of the enemy, resulted in even greater trouble for us."

"Do you insinuate, then, that I am a traitor?" Granet asked fiercely.

"I insinuate nothing," Thomson replied quietly. "So far as you and I are concerned, we may as well, I presume, understand one another. You are, without doubt, aware that my post as inspector of hospitals is a blind. I am, as a matter of fact, chief of the Intelligence Department, with a rank which at present I do not choose to use. I have been myself to your Brigadier-General and brought home this report, and if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, I brought also an urgent request that you should

not be allowed to rejoin any part of the force under his control."

"It was simply rotten luck," Granet muttered.

"I come here to a few more notes," Thomson proceeded. "I meet you some weeks ago at a luncheon party at the Ritz. A Belgian waiter, who I learned, by later inquiries, was present as a prisoner in the village where you were being entertained as a guest at the German headquarters, recognised you and was on the point of making a disclosure. The excitement, however, was too much for him and he fainted. He was at once removed, under your auspices, and died a few days later, at one of your uncle's country houses, before he could make any statement."

"This is ridiculous!" Granet exclaimed. "I never saw the fellow before in my life."

"Ridiculous, doubtless, but a coincidence," Major Thomson replied, turning over the next page of his book. "A little later I find you taking an immense interest in our new destroyers, trying, in fact, to induce young Conyers to explain our wire netting system, following him down to Portsmouth and doing your best to discover also the meaning of a new device attached to his destroyer."

"That is simply absurd," Granet protested. "I was interested in the subject, as any military officer would be in an important naval development. My journey to Portsmouth was simply an act of courtesy to Miss Conyers and her cousin."

"I find you next," Thomson went on immovably, "visiting the one French statesman whom we in England had cause to fear, in his hotel in London. I find

that very soon afterwards that statesman is in possession of an autograph letter from the Kaiser, offering peace to the French people on extraordinary terms. Who was the intermediary who brought that document, Captain Granet? "

Granet's face never twitched. He held himself with cold composure.

" These," he declared, " are fairy tales. Pailleton was a friend of mine. During my visit we did not speak of politics."

" More coincidences," Major Thomson remarked. " We pass on, then, to that night at Market Burnham Hall, when a Zeppelin was guided to the spot where Sir Meyville Worth was experimenting on behalf of the British Government, and dropped destructive bombs. A man was shot dead by the side of the flare. That man was one of your companions at the Dormy House Club."

" I neither spoke to him nor saw him there, except as a casual visitor," Granet insisted.

" That I venture to doubt," Major Thomson replied. " At any rate, there is enough circumstantial evidence against you in this book to warrant my taking the keenest interest in your future. As a matter of fact, you would have been at the Tower, or underneath it, at this very moment, but for the young lady who probably perjured herself to save you. Now that you know my opinion of you, Captain Granet, you will understand that I should hesitate before recommending you to any post whatever in the service of this country."

Granet made a stealthy movement forward. He

had been edging a little closer to the desk and he was barely two yards away. He suddenly paused. Thomson had closed the drawer now and he was holding a small revolver very steadily in his right hand.

"Granet," he said, "that sort of thing won't do. You know now what I think of you. Besides these little incidents which I have related, you are suspected of having, in the disguise of an American clergyman, delivered a message from the German Government to an English Cabinet Minister, and, to come to more personal matters, I myself suspect you of having made two attempts on my life. It is my firm belief that you are nothing more nor less than a common and dangerous German spy. Keep back!"

The veins were standing out like whipcord on Granet's flushed forehead. He swayed on his feet. Twice he had seemed as though he would spring at his opponent.

"Now listen to me," Thomson continued. "On Monday I am going from Southampton to Boulogne for forty-eight hours, to attend a court martial there. There is only one decent thing you can do. You know what that is. I'll have you exchanged, if you are willing, into a line regiment with your present rank. Your colonel will have a hint. It will be your duty to meet the first German bullet you can find. If you are content with that, I'll arrange it for you. If not —"

Major Thomson paused. There was a queer, twisted smile at the corners of his lips.

"If not," he concluded, "there is one more little

note to add in this book and the account will be full. You know now the terms, Captain Granet, on which you can go to the Front. I will give you ten days to consider."

"If I accept an offer like this," Granet protested, "I shall be pleading guilty to all the rubbish you have talked."

"If it weren't for the fact," Major Thomson told him sternly, "that you have worn his Majesty's uniform, that you are a soldier, and that the horror of it would bring pain to every man who has shared with you that privilege, I have quite enough evidence here to bring your career to a disgraceful end. I give you your chance, not for your own sake but for the honour of the Army. What do you say?"

Granet picked up his hat.

"I'll think it over," he muttered.

He walked out of the room without any attempt at farewell, pushed his way along the corridors, down the steps and out into Whitehall. His face was distorted by a new expression. A sudden hatred of Thomson had blazed up in him. He was at bay, driven there by a relentless enemy, the man who had tracked him down, as he honestly believed, to some extent through jealousy. The thoughts framed themselves quickly in his mind. With unseeing eyes he walked across Trafalgar Square and made his way to his club in Pall Mall. Here he wrote a few lines to Isabel Worth, regretting that he was called out of town on military business for forty-eight hours. Afterwards he took a taxi and called at his rooms, walked restlessly up and down while Jarvis

threw a few clothes into a bag, changed his own apparel for a rough tweed suit, and drove to Paddington. A few minutes later he took his place in the Cornish Express.

CHAPTER XXXII

Granet emerged from the Tregarten Hotel at St. Mary's on the following morning, about half-past eight, and strolled down the narrow strip of lawn which bordered the village street. A couple of boatmen advanced at once to meet him. Granet greeted them cheerily.

"Yes, I want a boat," he admitted. "I'd like to do a bit of sailing. A friend of mine was here and had a chap named Rowsell — Job Rowsell. Either of you answer to that name, by chance?"

The elder of the two shook his head.

"My name's Matthew Nichols," he announced, "and this is my brother-in-law, Joe Lethbridge. We've both of us got stout sailing craft and all the recommendations a man need have. As for Job Rowsell, well, he ain't here — not just at this moment, so to speak."

Granet considered the matter briefly.

"Well," he decided, "it seems to me I must talk to this chap Rowsell before I do anything. I'm under a sort of promise."

The two boatmen looked at one another. The one who had addressed him first turned a little away.

"Just as you like, sir," he announced. "No doubt Rowsell will be up this way towards afternoon."

"Afternoon? But I want to go out at once," Granet protested.

Matthew Nichols removed his pipe from his mouth and spat upon the ground thoughtfully.

"I doubt whether you'll get Job Rowsell to shift before mid-day. I'm none so sure he'll go out at all with this nor'wester blowing."

"What's the matter with him?" Granet asked. "Is he lazy?"

The man who as yet had scarcely spoken, swung round on his heel.

"He's no lazy, sir," he said. "That's not the right word. But he's come into money some way or other, Job Rowsell has. There's none of us knows how, and it ain't our business, but he spends most of his time in the public-house and he seems to have taken a fancy for night sailing alone, which to my mind, and there are others of us as say the same, ain't none too healthy an occupation. And that's all there is to be said of Job Rowsell, as I knows of."

"It's a good deal, too," Granet remarked thoughtfully. "Where does he live?"

"Fourth house on the left in yonder street," Matthew Nichols replied, pointing with his pipe. "Maybe he'll come if you send for him, maybe he won't."

"I must try to keep my word to my friend," Granet decided. "If I don't find him, I'll come back and look for you fellows again."

He turned back to the little writing-room, scribbled a note and sent it down by the boots. In about

half an hour he was called once more out into the garden. A huge, loose-jointed man was standing there, unshaven, untidily dressed, and with the look in his eyes of a man who has been drinking heavily.

"Are you Job Rowsell?" Granet inquired.

"That's my name," the man admitted. "Is there anything wrong with it?"

"Not that I know of," Granet replied. "I want you to take me out sailing. Is your boat ready?"

The man glanced up at the sky.

"I don't know as I want to go," he grumbled. "There's dirty weather about."

"I think you'd better," Granet urged. "I'm not a bad payer and I can help with the boat. Let's go and look at her, any way."

They walked together down to the harbour. Granet said very little, his companion nothing at all. They stood on the jetty and gazed across to where the sailing boats were anchored.

"That's the 'Saucy Jane,'" Job Rowsell indicated, stretching out a forefinger.

Granet scrambled down into a small dinghy which was tied to the side of the stone wall.

"We'd better be getting on board," he suggested.

Rowsell stared at him for a moment but acquiesced. They pulled across and boarded the "Saucy Jane." A boy whom they found on deck took the boat back. Rowsell set his sails slowly but with precision. The moment he stepped on board he seemed to become an altered man.

"Where might you be wanting to go?" he asked. "You'll need them oilskins, sure."

"I want to run out to the Bishop Lighthouse," Granet announced.

Rowsell shook his head.

"It's no sort of a day to face the Atlantic, sir," he declared. "We'll try a spin round St. Mary and White Island, if you like."

Granet fastened his oilskins and stooped for a moment to alter one of the sails.

"Look here," he said, taking his seat at the tiller, "this is my show, Job Rowsell. There's a five pound note for you at the end of the day, if you go where I tell you and nowhere else."

The man eyed him sullenly. A few minutes later they were rushing out of the harbour.

"It's a poor job, sailing a pleasure boat," he muttered. "Not many of us as wouldn't sell his soul for five pounds."

They reached St. Agnes before they came round on the first tack. Then, with the spray beating in their faces, they swung around and made for the opening between the two islands. For a time the business of sailing kept them both occupied. In two hours' time they were standing out towards Bishop Lighthouse. Job Rowsell took a long breath and filled a pipe with tobacco. He was looking more himself now.

"I'll bring her round the point there," he said, "and we'll come up the Channel and home by Bryher."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Granet ordered. "Keep her head out for the open sea till I tell you to swing round."

Rowsell looked at his passenger with troubled face.

"Are you another of 'em?" he asked abruptly.

"Don't you mind who I am," Granet answered. "I'm on a job I'm going to see through. If a fiver isn't enough for you, make it a tenner, but keep her going where I put her."

Rowsell obeyed but his face grew darker. He leaned towards his passenger.

"What's your game?" he demanded hoarsely. "There's some of them on the island 'd have me by the throat if they only knew the things I could tell 'em. What's your game here, eh? Are you on the cross?"

"I am not," Granet replied, "or I shouldn't have needed to bring you to sea. I know all about you, Job Rowsell. You're doing very well and you may do a bit better by and by. Now sit tight and keep a still tongue in your head."

They were in a queer part of the broken, rocky island group. There was a great indenture in the rocks up which the sea came hissing; to the left, round the corner, the lighthouse. Granet drew what looked to be a large pocket-handkerchief from the inner pocket of his coat, pulled down their pennant with nimble fingers, tied on another and hauled it up. Job Rowsell stared at him.

"What's that?"

"It's the German flag, you fool," Granet answered.

"I'll have none of that on my boat," the man declared surlily. "An odd fiver for a kindness —"

"Shut up!" Granet snapped, drawing his revolver

from his pocket. "You run the boat and mind your own business, Rowsell. I'm not out here to be fooled with. . . . My God!"

Almost at their side the periscope of a submarine had suddenly appeared. Slowly it rose to the surface. An officer in German naval uniform struggled up and called out. Granet spoke to him rapidly in German. Job Rowsell stared at them both, then he drew a flask from his pocket and took a long pull. The submarine grew nearer and Granet tossed a small roll of paper across the chasm of waters. All that passed between the two men was to Job Rowsell unintelligible. The last few words, however, the German repeated in English.

"The 'Princess Hilda' from Southampton, tomorrow at midnight," he repeated thoughtfully. "Well, it's a big business."

"It's worth it," Granet assured him. "They may call it a hospital ship but it isn't. I am convinced that the one man who is more dangerous to us than any other Englishman, will be on board."

"It shall then be done," the other promised. "So!"

He looked upward to the flag and saluted Granet. A great sea bore them a little apart. Granet pulled down the German flag, tied up a stone inside it and threw it into the next wave.

"You can take me back now," he told the boatman.

They were four hours making the harbour. Three times they failed to get round the last point, met at each time by clouds of hissing spray. When at last they sailed in, there was a little crowd to watch them.

Nichols and Lethbridge stood on one side with gloomy faces.

"It's a queer day for pleasure sailing," Nicholas remarked to Job Rowsell, as he came up the wet steps of the pier.

"It's all I want of it for a bit, any way," Rowsell muttered, pushing his way along the quay. "If there's any of you for a drink, I'm your man. What-ho, Nichols? — Lethbridge?"

Lethbridge muttered something and turned away. Nichols, too, declined.

"I am not sure, Job Rowsell," the latter declared, "that I like your money nor the way you earn it."

Job Rowsell stopped for a minute. There was an ugly look in his sullen face.

"If you weren't my own brother-in-law, Matthews Nichols," he said, "I'd shove those words down your throat."

"And if you weren't my sister's husband," Nichols retorted, turning away, "I'd take a little trip over to Penzance and say a few words at the Police Station there."

Granet laughed good-humouredly.

"You fellows don't need to get bad-tempered with one another," he observed. "Look here, I shall have three days here. I'll take one of you each day — make a fair thing of it, eh? You to-morrow, Nichols, and you the next day, Lethbridge. I'm not particular about the weather, as Job Rowsell can tell you, and I've sailed a boat since I was a boy. I'm no landlubber, am I, Rowsell?"

"No, you can sail the boat all right," Rowsell ad-

mitted, looking back over his shoulder. "You'd sail it into Hell itself, if one'd let you. Come on, you boys, if there's any one of you as fancies to drink. I'm wet to the skin."

Nichols' boat was duly prepared at nine o'clock on the following morning. Lethbridge shouted to him from the rails.

"Gentleman's changed his mind, I reckon. He went off on the eight o'clock boat for Penzance."

Nichols commenced stolidly to furl his sails again.

"It's my thinking, Lethbridge," he said, as he clambered into the dinghy, "that there's things going on in this island which you and me don't understand. I'm for a few plain words with Job Rowsell, though he's my own sister's husband."

"Plain words is more than you'll get from Job," Lethbridge replied gloomily. "He slept last night on the floor at the 'Blue Crown,' and he's there this morning, clamouring for brandy and pawing the air. He's got the blue devils, that's what he's got."

"There's money," Nichols declared solemnly, "some money, that is, that does no one any good."

CHAPTER XXXIII

There was a shrill whistle from the captain's bridge, and the steamer, which had scarcely yet gathered way, swung slowly around. Rushing up towards it through the mists came a little naval launch, in the stern of which a single man was seated. In an incredibly short space of time it was alongside, the passenger had climbed up the rope ladder, the pinnace had sheered off and the steamer was once more heading towards the Channel.

The newly-arrived passenger was making his way towards the saloon when a voice which seemed to come from behind a pile of rugs heaped around a steamer-chair, arrested his progress.

"Hugh! Major Thomson!"

He stopped short. Geraldine shook herself free from her rugs and sat up. They looked at one another in astonishment.

"Why, Geraldine," he exclaimed, "where are you off to?"

"To Boulogne, of course," she answered. "Don't pretend that you are surprised. Why, you got me the appointment yourself."

"Of course," he agreed, "only I had no idea that you were going just yet, or that you were on this boat."

"They told me to come out this week," she said, as he drew a chair to her side, "and so many of the nurses and doctors were going by this boat that I thought I would come, too. I feel quite a professional already. Nearly all the women here are in nurse's uniform and three-quarters of the men on board are doctors. Where are you going, Hugh?"

"Just to the Base and back again to-morrow," he told her. "There's a court martial I want to attend."

"Still mysterious," she laughed. "What have you to do with courts martial, Hugh?"

"Too much, just for the moment," he answered lightly. "Would you like some coffee or anything?"

She shook her head.

"No, thank you. I had an excellent supper before we started. I looked at some of the cabins but I decided to spend the night on deck. What about you? You seem to have arrived in a hurry."

"I missed the train in London," he explained. "They kept me at the War Office. Then I had to come down in a Government car and we couldn't quite catch up. Any news from Ralph?"

"I had a letter three days ago," she told him. "It was posted at Harwich but he couldn't say where he was, and of course he couldn't give me any news. Father came back from the Admiralty very excited yesterday, though. He says that we have sunk four or five more submarines, and that Ralph's new equipment is an immense success. By-the-bye, is there any danger of submarines here?"

"I shouldn't think so," Thomson answered.

"They are very busy round the Scilly Islands but we seem to have been able to keep them out of the Channel. I thought we should have been convoyed, though."

"In any case," she remarked, "we are a hospital ship. I expect they'd leave us alone. Major Thomson," she went on, "I wonder, do you really believe all these stories of the horrible doings of the Germans — the way they have treated drowning people attacked by their submarines, and these hateful stories of Belgium? Sometimes it seems to me as though there were a fog of hatred which had sprung up between the two countries, and we could neither of us quite see clearly what the other was doing."

"I think there is something in that," Major Thomson agreed. "On the other hand, I think it is part of the German principle to make war ruthlessly. I have seen things in Belgium which I shall never forget. As to the submarine business, if half the things are true that we have read, they seem to have behaved like brutes. It's queer, too," he went on, "for as a rule seamen are never cruel."

They were silent for a time. For some reason or other, they both avoided mention of the one subject which was in the minds of both. It was not until after the steward had brought him some coffee and they were more than half-way across, that Thomson a little abruptly asked her a question.

"Have you seen anything of Captain Granet lately?"

"Nothing," she replied.

He turned his head slightly towards her.

"Would it trouble you very much if he never came to see you again?"

She was watching the misty dawn.

"I do not know," she answered, "but I think that he will come."

"I am not so sure," he told her.

"Do you mean that he is in any fresh trouble?" she asked quickly.

"I don't think he needs any fresh trouble exactly," Thomson remarked, "but suppose we leave him alone for a little time? Our meeting was so unexpected, and, for me, such a pleasure. Don't let us spoil it."

"Let us talk of other things," she agreed readily. "Tell me, for instance, just what does a submarine look like when it pops up out of the sea?"

"I have never seen one close to," he admitted, "except on the surface. Why do you ask?"

She pointed with her forefinger to a little spot almost between two banks of mist.

"Because I fancied just now that I saw something sticking up out of the water there, something which might have been the periscope of a submarine," she replied.

He looked in the direction which she indicated but shook his head.

"I can see nothing," he said, "but in any case I don't think they would attack a hospital ship. This is a dangerous area for them, too. We are bound to have a few destroyers close at hand. I wonder if Ralph —"

He never finished his sentence. The shock which they had both read about but never dreamed of ex-

periencing, flung them without a moment's warning on to their hands and feet. The steamer seemed as though it had been lifted out of the water. There was a report as though some great cannon had been fired off in their very ears. Looking along the deck, it suddenly seemed to Thomson that her bows were pointing to the sky. The after portion, where they were seated, was vibrating and shaking as though they had struck a rock, and only a few yards away from them, towards the middle of the boat, the end of the cabin was riven bare to the heavens. Timbers were creaking and splintering in every direction. There was a great gap already in the side of the steamer, as though some one had taken a cut out of it. Then, high above the shrieking of the escaped steam and the cracking of woodwork, the siren of the boat screamed out its frantic summons for help. Geraldine for the moment lost her nerve. She began to shriek, and ran towards the nearest boat, into which the people were climbing like ants. Thomson drew her back.

"Don't hurry," he begged. "Here!"

He threw open the door of a cabin which leaned over them, snatched two of the lifebelts from the berth and rapidly fastened one on her. There was some semblance of order on deck now that the first confusion had passed. The men were all rushing to quarters. Three of the boats had been blown into splinters upon their davits. The fourth, terribly overloaded, was being lowered. Thomson, working like a madman, was tying some spare belts on to a table which had floated out from the cabin. More

than once the boat gave a great plunge and they had to hold on to the cabin doors. A huge wave broke completely over them, drenching them from head to foot. The top of the rail now was on a level with the sea. Thomson stood up for a moment and looked around. Then he turned to Geraldine.

"Look here," he said, "there'll be plenty of craft around to pick us up. This thing can't sink. Keep the lifebelt on and get your arms through the belt I have tied on to the table, so. That's right. Now come over to the side."

"You're not going to jump overboard?" she cried.

"We are going to just step overboard," he explained. "It's the only chance. Throw off your fur cloak. You see, if we stay a moment later we shall be dragged down after the steamer. We must get clear while we can."

"But what about you? You haven't even a belt on!" she cried.

"I can swim," he answered quickly, throwing off his coat and waistcoat. "This thing will support me easily. Believe me, Geraldine, there's nothing to be frightened about. We can keep afloat for half-a-dozen hours, if necessary, with this, only don't let go of it. Keep your arm through, and — by God! Quick!"

A huge wave broke right over their heads. The boat, which had nearly reached the level of the water, was overturned, and the air seemed full of the screaming of women, the loud shouting of orders from the bridge, where the captain was standing with his hands upon the fast sinking rail. The water was

up to their waists now. In a moment they ceased to feel anything beneath their feet. Geraldine found herself suddenly buoyant. Thomson, swimming with one arm, locked his other in their raft.

"Push yourself away from everything as well as you can," he whispered, "and, Geraldine — if anything should happen to us, I never changed — not for a moment."

"I don't believe I ever did, either," she sobbed, holding out her hand.

Another wave broke over them. They came up, however. He gripped her wet hand for a moment. All around them were articles of ship's furniture, broken planks, here and there a man swimming. From close at hand came the shriek of the vanishing siren.

"Look!" Geraldine cried.

Barely fifty feet away from them was the submarine. The captain and four or five of the men were on deck. Thomson shouted to him.

"Can't you save some of these women?"

The answer was a laugh — hoarse, brutal, derisive. The submarine glided away. Thomson's face, as he looked after it, was black with anger. The next moment he recovered himself, however. He had need of all his strength.

"Don't listen to anything, Geraldine," he begged her. "They will nearly all be saved. Can't you hear the sirens already? There are plenty of ships coming up. Remember, we can't go down so long as we keep hold here."

"But you've no lifebelt on," she faltered.

"I don't need it," he assured her. "I can keep afloat perfectly well. You're not cold?"

"No," she gasped, "but I feel so low down. The sky seems suddenly further away. Oh, if some one would come!"

There were sirens now, and plenty of them, close at hand. Out of the mist they saw a great black hull looming.

"They're here all right!" he cried. "Courage, Geraldine! It's only another five minutes."

Thirty miles an hour into a fog of mist, with the spray falling like a fountain and the hiss of the sea-water like devil's music in their ears. Then the haze lifted like the curtain before the stage of a theatre, and rolled away into the dim distance. An officer stood by Conyers' side.

"Hospital ship 'Princess Hilda' just torpedoed by a submarine, sir. They're picking up the survivors already. We're right into 'em, sir."

Even as he spoke, the moonlight shone down. There were two trawlers and a patrol boat in sight, and twenty or thirty boats rowing to the scene of the disaster. Suddenly there was a shout.

"Submarine on the port bow!"

They swung around. The sea seemed churned into a mass of soapy foam. Conyers gripped the rail in front of him. The orders had scarcely left his lips before the guns were thundering out. The covered-in structure on the lower deck blazed with an unexpected light. The gun below swung slowly downwards, moved by some unseen instrument. Col-

umns of spray leapt into the air, the roar of the guns was deafening. Then there was another shout — a hoarse yell of excitement. Barely a hundred yards away, the submarine, wobbling strangely, appeared on the surface. An officer in the stern held up the white flag.

"We are sinking!" he shouted. "We surrender!"

For a single second Conyers hesitated. Then he looked downwards. The corpse of a woman went floating by; a child, tied on to a table, was bobbing against the side. The red fires flashed before his eyes; the thunder of his voice broke the momentary stillness. In obedience to his command, the guns belched out a level line of flame, — there was nothing more left of the submarine, or of the men clinging on to it like flies. Conyers watched them disappear without the slightest change of expression.

"Hell's the only place for them!" he muttered. "Send out the boats, Johnson, and cruise around. There may be something else left to be picked up."

The word of command was passed forward and immediately a boat was lowered.

"A man and a woman clinging to a table, sir," an officer reported to Conyers. "We're bringing them on board."

Conyers moved to the side of the bridge. He saw Geraldine lifted into the boat, and Thomson, as soon as she was safe, clamber in after her. He watched them hauled up on to the deck of the destroyer and suddenly he recognised them.

"My God!" he exclaimed, as he dashed down the ladder. "It's Geraldine!"

She was standing on the deck, the wet streaming from her, supported by a sailor on either side. She gasped a little when she saw him. She was quite conscious and her voice was steady.

"We are both here, Ralph," she cried, "Hugh and I. He saved my life. Thank heavens you are here!"

Already the steward was hastening forward with brandy. Geraldine sipped a little and passed the glass to Thomson. Then she turned swiftly to her brother. There was an unfamiliar look in her face.

"Ralph," she muttered, "don't bother about us. Don't stop for anything else. Can't you find that submarine? I saw them all — the men — laughing as they passed away!"

Conyers' eyes blazed for a moment with reminiscent fury. Then his lips parted and he broke into strange, discordant merriment.

"They'll laugh no more in this world, Geraldine," he cried, in fierce triumph. "They're down at the bottom of the sea, every man and dog of them!"

She gripped him by the shoulder — Geraldine, who had never willingly hurt even an insect.

"Ralph," she sobbed, "thank God! Thank God you did it!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

It was towards the close of an unusually long day's work and Major Thomson sighed with relief as he realised that at last his anteroom was empty. He lit a cigarette and stretched himself in his chair. He had been interviewed by all manner of people, had listened to dozens of suspicious stories. His work had been intricate and at times full of detail. On the whole, a good day's work, he decided, and he had been warmly thanked over the wires by a Brigadier-General at Harwich for his arrest and exposure of a man who had in his possession a very wonderful plan of the Felixstowe land defences. He lit a cigarette and glanced at his watch. Just then the door was hurriedly opened. Ambrose came in without even the usual ceremony of knocking. He held a worn piece of paper in his hands. There was a triumphant ring in his tone as he looked up from it towards his chief.

"I've done it, sir!" he exclaimed. "Stumbled across it quite by accident. I've got the whole code. It's based upon the leading articles in the *Times* of certain dates. Here's this last message — '*Leave London June 4th. Have flares midnight Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's steps, gardens in front of Savoy. Your last report received.*'"

"'*Leave London June 4th*,'" Thomson repeated, glancing at the calendar, — "to-day! '*Have flares*,' — Zeppelins, Ambrose!"

The clerk nodded.

"I thought of them at once, sir," he agreed. "That's a very plain and distinct warning in a remarkably complicated code, and it's addressed — to Sir Alfred Anselman."

A smouldering light flashed in Thomson's eyes.

"Ambrose," he declared, "you're a brick. I sha'n't forget this. Just find out at once if the Chief's in his room, please."

There followed half an hour of breathless happenings. From the Chief's room Thomson hurried over to the Admiralty. Here he was taken by one of the men whom he had called to see, on to the flat roof, and they stood there, facing eastwards. Twilight was falling and there was scarcely a breath of air.

"It's a perfect night," the official remarked. "If they start at the right time, they'll get here before any one can see them. All the same, we're warning the whole coast, and our gun-stations will be served all night."

"Shall we have a chance, do you think, of hitting any of them?" Thomson asked.

The sailor winked.

"There are a couple of gun-stations I know of not far from here," he said. "I tell you they've got armament there which will make our friends tear their hair; shells that burst in the air, mind, too, which you needn't mind letting 'em have as quick as

we can fire 'em off. I shall try and get on to one of those stations myself at midnight."

"What time do you think they'd attack if they do get over?"

The other took out his watch and considered the subject.

"Of course," he reflected, "they'll want to make the most of the darkness, but I think what they'll aim at chiefly is to get here unobserved. Therefore, I think they won't start until it's dark, probably from three or four different bases. That means they'll be here a little before dawn. I shall just motor my people up to Harrow and get back again by midnight."

Thomson left the Admiralty, a little later, and took a taxi to Berkeley Square. The servant hesitated a little at his inquiry.

"Miss Geraldine is in, sir, I believe," he said. "She is in the morning-room at the moment."

"I shall not keep her," Thomson promised. "I know that it is nearly dinner-time."

The man ushered him across the hall and threw open the door of the little room at the back of the stairs.

"Major Thomson, madam," he announced.

Geraldine rose slowly from the couch on which she had been seated. Standing only a few feet away from her was Granet. The three looked at one another for a moment and no word was spoken. It was Geraldine who first recovered herself.

"Hugh!" she exclaimed warmly. "Why, you are another unexpected visitor!"

"I should not have come at such a time," Thomson explained, "but I wanted just to have a word with you, Geraldine. If you are engaged, your mother would do."

"I am not in the least engaged," Geraldine assured him, "and I have been expecting to hear from you all day. I got back from Boulogne last night."

"None the worse, I am glad to see," Thomson remarked.

She shivered a little. Then she looked him full in the face and her eyes were full of unspoken things.

"Thanks to you," she murmured. "However," she added, with a little laugh, "I don't want to frighten you away, and I know what would happen if I began to talk about our adventure. I am sorry, Captain Granet," she went on, turning towards where he was standing, "but I cannot possibly accept your aunt's invitation. It is very good of her to ask me and very kind of you to want me to go so much, but to-night I could not leave my mother. She has been having rather a fit of nerves about Ralph the last few days, and she hates being left alone."

"Captain Granet is trying to persuade you to leave London this evening?" Thomson asked quietly.

"He wants me very much to go down to Lady Anselman's at Reigate to-night," Geraldine explained. "I really accepted Lady Anselman's invitation some days ago, but that was before mother was so unwell. I have written your aunt, Captain Granet," she continued, turning to him. "Do please explain to her how disappointed I am, and it

was very nice of you to come and ask me to change my mind."

There was a brief but rather curious silence. Granet had turned away from Geraldine as though to address Thomson. He was meeting now the silent, half contemptuous challenge of the latter's eyes.

"Captain Granet is showing great consideration for your comfort and safety," Thomson remarked.

Granet for a moment forgot himself. His eyes flashed. He was half angry, half terrified.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Thomson made no immediate answer. He seemed to be pondering over his words, his expression was inscrutable. Geraldine looked from one to the other.

"There is something between you two which I don't understand," she declared.

"There is a very great deal about Captain Granet which I am only just beginning to understand," Thomson said calmly. "You should find his solicitude about your movements this evening a great compliment, Geraldine. It arises entirely from his desire to spare you the shock of what may turn out yet to be a very lamentable catastrophe."

"You two men are quite incomprehensible," Geraldine sighed. "If only either of you would speak plainly!"

Thomson bowed.

"Perhaps I may be able to indulge you presently," he observed. "Since you have failed to persuade Miss Conyers to leave London, Captain Granet," he went on, turning towards the latter, "may I ask what your own movements are likely to be?"

"You may not," was the passionate reply. "They are no concern of yours."

"They are unfortunately," Thomson retorted, "my very intimate concern. This, you will remember, is your ninth day of grace. It is not my desire that you should suffer unduly for your humane visit here, but I might remind you that under the circumstances it is a little compromising. No, don't interrupt me! We understand one another, I am quite sure."

Granet had taken a step backwards. His face for a moment was blanched, his lips opened but closed again without speech. Thomson was watching him closely.

"Precisely," he went on. "You have guessed the truth, I can see. We have been able, within the last few hours, to decode that very interesting message which reached your uncle some little time ago."

Geraldine's bewilderment increased. Granet's almost stupefied silence seemed to amaze her.

"Hugh, what does it all mean?" she cried. "Is Captain Granet in trouble because he has come here to warn me of something? He has not said a word except to beg me to go down into the country to-night."

"And he has begged you to do that," Thomson said, "because he is one of those privileged few who have been warned that to-night or to-morrow morning is the time selected for the Zeppelin raid on London of which we have heard so much. Oh! he knows all about it, and his uncle, and a great many of the guests they have gathered together. They'll all be

safe enough at Reigate! Come, Captain Granet, what have you to say about it?"

Granet drew himself up. He looked every inch a soldier, and, curiously enough, he seemed in his bearing and attitude to be respecting the higher rank by virtue of which Thomson had spoken.

"To-morrow, as you have reminded me, is my tenth day, sir," he said. "I shall report myself at your office at nine o'clock. Good-bye, Miss Conyers! I hope that even though I have failed, Major Thomson may persuade you to change your mind."

He left the room. Geraldine was so amazed that she made no movement towards ringing the bell. She turned instead towards Thomson.

"What does it mean? You must tell me!" she insisted. "I am not a child."

"It means that what I have told you all along is the truth," Thomson replied earnestly. "You thought, Geraldine, that I was narrow and suspicious. I had powers and an office and responsibilities, too, which you knew nothing of. That young man who has just left the room is in the pay of Germany. So is his uncle."

"What, Sir Alfred Anselman?" she exclaimed. "Are you mad, Hugh?"

"Not in the least," he assured her. "These are bald facts."

"But Sir Alfred Anselman! He has done such wonderful things for the country. They all say that he ought to have been in the Cabinet. Hugh, you can't be serious!"

"I am so far serious," Thomson declared grimly,

" that an hour ago we succeeded in decoding a message from Holland to Sir Alfred Anselman, advising him to leave London to-day. We are guessing what that means. We may be right and we may be wrong. We shall see. I come to beg you to leave the city for twenty-four hours. I find Granet on the same errand."

" But they may have warned him — some personal friend may have done it," she insisted. " He is a man with world-wide friends and world-wide connections."

" Then why didn't he bring the warning straight to the Admiralty? " Thomson argued. " If he were a patriotic Englishman, do you think that any other course was open to him? It won't do, Geraldine. I know more about Captain Granet than I am going to tell you at this moment. Shall we leave that subject? Can't we do something to persuade your mother to take you a little way from town? You can collect some of your friends, if you like. You ought to take Olive, for instance. We don't want a panic, but there is no reason why you shouldn't tell any of your friends quietly."

The door was suddenly opened. The Admiral put his head in.

" Sorry! " he apologised. " I thought I heard that young Granet was here."

" He has been and gone, father," Geraldine told him. " You'd better see what you can do with father," she added, turning to Thomson.

" What's wrong, eh? What's wrong? What's wrong? " the Admiral demanded.

"The fact is, Sir Seymour," Thomson explained, "we've had notice — not exactly notice, but we've decoded a secret dispatch which gives us reason to believe that a Zeppelin raid will be attempted on London during the next twenty-four hours. I came round to try and induce Geraldine to have you all move away until the thing's over."

"I'll be damned if I do!" the Admiral grunted. "What, sneak off and leave five or six million others who haven't had the tip, to see all the fun? Not I! If what you say is true, Thomson, — and I am going straight back to the Admiralty, — I shall find my way on to one of the air stations myself, and the women can stay at home and get ready to be useful."

Geraldine passed her hand through her father's arm.

"That's the sort of people we are," she laughed, turning to Thomson. "All the same, Hugh, it was very nice of you to come," she added. "I couldn't see us scuttling away into the country, you know. I shall go round and persuade Olive to stay with me. I am expecting to return to Boulogne almost at once, to the hospital there, to bring some more wounded back. I may get a little practice here."

Thomson picked up his hat.

"Well," he said quietly, "I cannot complain of your decision. After all, it is exactly what I expected."

He made his adieux and departed. The Admiral sniffed as he glanced after him.

"Very good chap, Thomson," he remarked, "but

he doesn't quite understand. I bet you that fine young fellow Granet would never have suggested our running away like frightened sheep! Come along, my dear, we'll go and dine."

CHAPTER XXXV

About three o'clock the next morning Thomson was awakened by a light touch upon his shoulder. He sprang up from the couch upon which he had thrown himself. Ambrose was standing over him. He was still in his room at the War Office, and fully dressed.

"Mr. Gordon Jones has rung up from Downing Street, sir," he announced. "He is with the Prime Minister. They want to know if you could step across."

"I'll go at once," Thomson agreed, — "just sponge my eyes and have a brush up. Nothing else fresh, Ambrose?"

"Nothing at all, sir," the young man replied. "All the newspapers in London have rung up but of course we have not answered any of them. You'll be careful outside, please? There isn't a single light anywhere, and the streets are like pitch. A man tried to use an electric torch on the other side of the way just now, and they shot him. There's a double line of sentries all round from Whitehall corner."

"No flares this time, eh?" Thomson muttered. "All right, Ambrose, I think I can feel my way there."

He descended into the street but for a few moments

he found himself hopelessly at sea. So far as he could see there was no light nor any glimmer of one. He reached the corner of the street like a blind man, by tapping the kerbstone with his cane. Arrived here, he stood for a moment in the middle of the road, bareheaded. There was not a breath of wind anywhere. He made his way carefully down towards Downing Street, meeting few people, and still obliged to grope rather than walk. Along Downing Street he made his way by the railings and rang the bell at last at the Premier's house. He was shown at once into the council room. The four or five men who were seated around a table, and who looked up at his entrance, bore, every one of them, household names. The Premier held out his hand.

"Good evening, Major Thomson," he began. "Please sit down and join us for a moment."

Thomson was a little surprised at the gathering.

"You'll forgive my suggesting that this is likely to be a marked spot to-night," he said.

The Premier smiled.

"Well, you could scarcely expect us to hide, could you, Major Thomson?" he remarked. "In any case, there is not one of us who is not prepared to share what the other citizens of London have to face. The country for the women and children, if you please. We gather, sir, that it is chiefly through you that we are in the fortunate position of being prepared to-night."

"It was through my action in a matter which I understand has been subjected to a great deal of criticism," Thomson replied.

"I admit it frankly," the statesman acknowledged. "That particular matter, the matter of your censorship of a certain letter, has been the subject of a grave and earnest conference here between us all. We decided to send for you. We telephoned first of all to the Chief but he told us that you were entirely head of your department and responsible to no one, that you had been — forgive me — a brilliant success, and that it was his intention to interfere in no possible way with any course you chose to take. I may say that he intimated as much to me when I went to him, simply furious because you had removed a certain person from the list of those whose correspondence is free from censorship."

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" Thomson asked.

"Listen to us while we put a matter to you from a common-sense point of view," Mr. Gordon Jones begged. "You see who we are. We are those upon whose shoulders rests chiefly the task of ruling this country. I want to tell you that we have come to a unanimous decision. We say nothing about the moral or the actual guilt of Sir Alfred Anselman. How far he may have been concerned in plotting with our country's enemies is a matter which we may know in the future, but for the present — well, let's make a simple matter of it — we want him left alone."

"You wish him to continue in his present high position?" Thomson said slowly, — "a man who is convicted of having treasonable correspondence with our enemy?"

"We wish him left alone," Mr. Gordon Jones con-

tinued earnestly, "not for his own sake but for ours. When the time comes, later on, it may be possible for us to deal with him. To-day, no words of mine could explain to you his exact utility. He has a finger upon the money-markets of the world. He has wealth, great wealth, and commands great wealth in every city. Frankly, this man as an open enemy to-day could bring more harm upon us than if any neutral Power you could name were to join the Triple Alliance. Remember, too, Major Thomson, that there may be advantages to us in this waiting attitude. Since your warning, his letters can be admitted to censorship. You have the control of a great staff of military detectives; the resources of Scotland Yard, too, are at your service. Have him watched day and night, his letters opened, his every movement followed, but don't provoke him to open enmity. We don't want him in the Tower. The scandal and the shock of it would do us enormous harm, apart from the terrible financial panic which would ensue. We will see to it that he does no further mischief than he may already have done. We make an appeal to you, all of us here to-night. Be guided entirely by us in this matter. You have rendered the country great service by your discovery. Render it a greater one, Major Thomson, by keeping that discovery secret."

"I will not make conditions with you," Thomson replied gravely. "I will say at once that I am perfectly willing to yield to your judgment in this matter. In return I ask something. I have more serious charges still to bring against Sir Alfred's nephew.

Will you leave the matter of dealing with this young man in my hands?"

"With pleasure," the Premier agreed. "I think, gentlemen," he added, looking around the table, "that we need not detain Major Thomson any longer? We others have still a little business to finish."

It was all over in those few minutes and Thomson found himself in the street again. He guided his way by the railings into Whitehall. The blackness seemed to him to be now less impenetrable. Looking fixedly eastward he seemed to be conscious of some faint lightening in the sky. He heard the rumbling of carts in the road, the horses mostly being led by their drivers. Here and there, an odd taxicab which had escaped the police orders came along with one lamp lit, only to be stopped in a few yards and escorted to the edge of the pavement. All the way up Whitehall there was one long line of taxicabs, unable to ply for hire or find their way to the garages until daylight. The unusualness of it all was almost stimulating. At the top of the broad thoroughfare, Thomson turned to the left through the Pall Mall Arch and passed into St. James's Park. He strolled slowly along until he came to the thoroughfare to the left, leading down to the Admiralty. There he paused for a moment, and, turning around, listened intently. He was possessed of particularly keen hearing and it seemed to him as though from afar off he could hear the sound of a thousand muffled hammers beating upon an anvil; of a strange, methodical disturbance in the air. He grasped the rail-

ing with one hand and gazed upward with straining eyes. Just at that moment he saw distinctly what appeared to be a flash of lightning in the sky, followed by a report which sounded like a sharp clap of thunder. Then instinctively he covered his eyes with his hands. From a dozen places — one close at hand — a long, level stream of light seemed to shoot out towards the clouds. There was one of them which came from near the Carlton Hotel, which lit up the whole of the Pall Mall Arch with startling distinctness, gave him a sudden vision of the Admiralty roof, and, as he followed it up, brought a cry to his lips. Far away, beyond even the limits of the quivering line of light, there was something in the sky which seemed a little blacker than the cloud. Even while he looked at it, from the Admiralty roof came a lurid flash, the hiss and screech of a shell as it dashed upwards. And then the sleeping city seemed suddenly to awake and the night to become hideous. Not fifty yards away from him something fell in the Park, and all around him lumps of gravel and clods of earth fell in a shower. A great elm tree fell crashing into the railings close by his side. Then there was a deafening explosion, the thunder of falling masonry, and a house by the side of the arch broke suddenly into flames. A few moments later, a queer sight amongst all these untoward and unexpected happenings, a fire engine dashed under the arch, narrowly missing the broken fragments of brick and stone, swung around, and a dozen fire-hoses commenced to play upon the flaming building.

The darkness was over now, and the silence. There

were houses on the other side of the river on fire, and scarcely a moment passed without the crash of a falling bomb. The air for a second or two was filled with piteous shrieks from somewhere towards Charing-Cross, shrieks drowned almost immediately by another tremendous explosion from further north. Every now and then, looking upwards in the line of the long searchlights, Thomson could distinctly see the shape of one of the circling airships. Once the light flashed downwards, and between him and Buckingham Palace he saw a great aeroplane coming head foremost down, heard it strike the ground with a tremendous crash, heard the long death cry, a cry which was more like a sob, of the men who perished with it. . . .

Every moment the uproar became more deafening. From all sorts of unsuspected places and buildings came the lightning quiver of the guns, followed by the shrieking of the shells. Right on to the tops of the houses between where he was standing and the Carlton, another aeroplane fell, smashing the chimneys and the windows and hanging there like a gigantic black bat. There was not a soul anywhere near him, but by the occasional flashes of light Thomson could see soldiers and hurrying people in the Admiralty Square, and along the Strand he could hear the patter of footsteps upon the pavement. But he himself remained alone, a silent, spellbound, fascinated witness of this epic of slaughter and ruin.

Then came what seemed to him to be its culmination. High above his head he was suddenly conscious of a downward current of air. He looked up.

The shouting of voices, apparently from the falling clouds, voices unfamiliar and guttural, warned him of what was coming. The darkness which loomed over him, took shape. He turned and ran for his life. Only a little way above his head a storm of shrapnel now was streaming from the lowered guns of the Admiralty. Turning back to look, he saw, scarcely fifty yards above him, the falling of a huge Zeppelin. He felt himself just outside its range and paused, breathless. With a crash which seemed to split the air, the huge structure fell. The far end of it, all buckled up, rested against the back of the Admiralty. The other end was only a few yards from where Thomson stood, at the bottom of the steps leading up into Pall Mall. A dozen search-lights played upon it. Men suddenly appeared as though from underneath. Some of them stood for a moment and swayed like drunken men, others began to run. Round the corner from the Admiralty Square a little company of soldiers came with fixed bayonets. There was a shout. Two of the men ran on.

Thomson heard the crack of a rifle and saw one of them leap into the air and collapse. The other one staggered and fell on his knees. A dozen of them were there together with their hands stretched to the skies. Then Thomson was conscious that one of the oil-clad figures was coming in his direction, making for the steps, running with swift, stealthy gait. A flash of light gleamed upon the fugitive for a moment. He wore a hat like a helmet; only his face, blackened with grease, and his staring eyes, were

visible. He came straight for Thomson, breathing heavily.

"Hands up!" Thomson cried.

The man aimed a furious blow at him. Thomson, who quite unconsciously had drawn a revolver from his pocket, shot him through the heart, watched him jump up and fall, a senseless, shapeless heap upon the bottom of the steps, and, with a queer instinct of bloodthirstiness, ran down the line of the wrecked Zeppelin, seeking for more victims. The soldiers were coming up in force now, however, and detachments of them were marching away their prisoners. Another company was stationed all around the huge craft, keeping guard. Thomson walked back once more towards the Admiralty. The sky was still lurid with the reflection of many fires but the roar of the guns had diminished, and for several minutes no bomb had been thrown. With the revolver in his hand still smoking, he ran into a man whom he knew slightly at the Admiralty.

"Thomson, by God!" the man exclaimed. "What are you doing with that revolver?"

Thomson looked at it.

"I don't know," he answered. "I've just shot one of those fellows from the Zeppelin. How are things going?"

"There are six Zeppelins down in different parts, and a couple of dozen aeroplanes," the other replied. "Woolwich is safe, and the Houses of Parliament and Whitehall. Heaps of reports to come in but I don't believe they've done much damage."

Thomson passed on. It was lighter now and the

streets were thronged with people. He turned once more towards the Strand and stood for a moment in Trafalgar Square. One wing of the National Gallery was gone, and the Golden Cross Hotel was in flames. Leaning against the Union Club was another fallen aeroplane. Men and women were rushing everywhere in wild excitement. He made his way down to the War Office. It seemed queer to find men at work still in their rooms. He sent Ambrose for an orderly and received a message from headquarters.

"Damage to public buildings and property not yet estimated. All dockyards and arsenals safe, principal public buildings untouched. Only seventeen dead and forty injured reported up to five minutes ago. Great damage done to enemy fleet; remainder in full retreat, many badly damaged. Zeppelin just down in Essex, four aeroplanes between here and Romford."

Thomson threw down his revolver.

"Well," he muttered to himself, "perhaps London will believe now that we are at war!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

"London, too, has its scars, and London is proud of them," a great morning paper declared the next morning. "The last and gigantic effort of German 'frightfulness' has come and passed. London was visited before dawn this morning by a fleet of sixteen Zeppelins and forty aeroplanes. Seven of these former monsters lie stranded and wrecked in various parts of the city, two are known to have collapsed in Essex, and another is reported to have come to grief in Norfolk. Of the aeroplanes, nineteen were shot down, and of the rest so far no news has been heard. The damage to life and property, great though it may seem, is much less than was expected. Such losses as we have sustained we shall bear with pride and fortitude. We stand now more closely than ever in touch with our gallant allies. We, too, bear the marks of battle in the heart of our country."

Thomson paused to finish his breakfast, and abandoning the leading article turned to a more particular account.

"The loss of life," the journal went on to say, "although regrettable, is, so far as accounts have reached us, not large. There are thirty-one civilians killed, a hundred and two have been admitted into hospitals, and, curiously enough, only one person bear-

ing arms has suffered. We regret deeply to announce the death of a very distinguished young officer, Captain Ronald Granet, a nephew of Sir Alfred Anselman. A bomb passed through the roof of his house in Sackville Street, completely shattering the apartment in which he was sitting. His servant perished with him. The other occupants of the building were, fortunately for them, away for the night."

The paper slipped from Thomson's fingers. He looked through the windows of his room, across the Thames. Exactly opposite to him a fallen chimney and four blackened walls, still smouldering, were there to remind him of the great tragedy. He looked down at the paper again. There was no mistake. It was the judgment of a higher Court than his!

He made his way down to the War Office at a little before ten o'clock. The streets were crowded with people and there were throngs surrounding each of the places where bombs had been dropped. Towards the Pall Mall Arch the people were standing in thousands, trying to get near the wreck of the huge Zeppelin, which completely blocked all the traffic through St. James's Park. Thomson paused for a moment at the top of Trafalgar Square and looked around him. The words of the newspaper were indeed true. London had her scars, yet there was nothing in the faces of the people to show fear. If anything, there was an atmosphere all around of greater vitality, of greater intensity. The war had come a little nearer at last than the columns of the daily Press. It was the real thing with which even the every-day Londoner had rubbed shoulders. From Cockspur Street

to Nelson's Monument the men were lined up in a long queue, making their way to the recruiting office.

Admiral Conyers paid his usual morning visit to the Admiralty, lunched at his club and returned home that evening in a state of suppressed excitement. He found his wife and Geraldine alone and at once took up his favourite position on the hearthrug.

"Amongst the other surprises of the last twenty-four hours," he announced, "I received one to-day which almost took my breath away. It had reference to a person whom you both know."

"Not poor Captain Granet?" Lady Conyers asked. "You read about him, of course?"

"Nothing to do with Granet, poor fellow," the Admiral continued. "Listen. I was walking, if you please, for a few yards with the man who is practically responsible to-day for the conduct of the war. At the corner of Pall Mall we came face to face with Thomson. I nodded and we were passing on, when to my astonishment my companion stopped and held out both his hands. 'Thomson, my dear fellow,' he said, 'I came round to your rooms to-day but you were engaged three or four deep. Not another word save this — thanks! When we write our history, the country will know what it owes you. At present, thanks!'"

"Major Thomson?" Lady Conyers gasped.

"Hugh?" Geraldine echoed.

The Admiral smiled.

"We passed on," he continued, "and I said to his lordship — 'Wasn't that Thomson, the Inspector

of Field Hospitals?' He simply laughed at me. 'My dear Conyers,' he said, 'surely you knew that was only a blind? Thomson is head of the entire Military Intelligence Department. He has the rank of a Brigadier-General waiting for him when he likes to take it. He prefers to remain as far as possible unknown and unrecognised, because it helps him with his work.' Now listen! You've read in all the papers, of course, that we had warning of what was coming last night, that the reason we were so successful was because every light in London had been extinguished and every gun-station was doubly manned? Well, the warning we received was due to Thomson and no one else!"

"And to think," Lady Conyers exclaimed, "that we were half afraid to tell your father that Hugh was coming to dinner!"

Geraldine had slipped from the room. The Admiral blew his nose.

"I hope Geraldine's going to be sensible," he said. "I've always maintained that Thomson was a fine fellow, only Geraldine seemed rather carried away by that young Granet. Poor fellow! One can't say anything about him now, but he was just the ordinary type of showy young soldier, not fit to hold a candle to a man like Thomson."

Lady Conyers was a little startled.

"You have such sound judgment, Seymour," she murmured.

Thomson was a few minutes late for dinner but even the Admiral forgave him.

"Just ourselves, Thomson," he said, as they made their way into the dining-room. "What a shock the Chief gave me to-day! You've kept things pretty dark. Inspector of Hospitals, indeed!"

Thomson smiled.

"That was my excuse," he explained, "for running backwards and forwards between France and England at the beginning of the war. There's no particular secret about my position now. I've had a very hard fight to keep it, a very hard fight to make it a useful one. Until last night, at any rate, it hasn't seemed to me that English people realised that we were at war. Now, I hope at last that we are going to take the gloves off. Do you know," he went on, a little later, "that in France they think we're mad. Honestly, in my position, if I had had the French laws at my back I believe that by to-day the war would have been over. As it is, when I started even my post was a farce. We had to knuckle under, the whole of the time, to the civil authorities. They wanted to fine a spy ten shillings or to bind him over to keep the peace! I've never had to fight for anything so hard in my life as I've had to fight once or twice for my file of men at the Tower. At the beginning of the war we'd catch them absolutely red-handed. All they had to do was to surrender to the civil authorities, and we had a city magistrate looking up statutes to see how to deal with them."

"There are a good many things which will make strange reading after the war is over," the Admiral said grimly. "I fancy that my late department will provide a few sensations. Still, our very mistakes are

our justification. We were about as ready for war as Lady Conyers there is to play Rugby football for Oxford."

"It has taken us the best part of a year to realise what war means," Thomson assented. "Even now there are people whom one meets every day who seem to be living in abstractions."

"Last night's raid ought to wake a few of them up," the Admiral grunted. "I should like to have shown those devils where to have dropped a few of their little toys. There are one or two men who were making laws not so long ago, who'd have had a hole in their roofs."

Geraldine laughed softly.

"I really think that dad feels more bloodthirsty when he talks about some of our politicians than he does about the Germans," she declared.

"Some of our worst enemies are at home, any way," Sir Seymour insisted, "and we shall never get on with the war till we've weeded them out."

"Where did the nearest bomb to you drop?" Thomson inquired.

"The corner of St. James's Street," Sir Seymour replied. "There were two houses in Berkeley Street alight, and a hole in the roof of a house in Hay Hill. The bomb there didn't explode, though. Sad thing about young Granet, wasn't it? He seems to be the only Service man who suffered at all."

Lady Conyers shivered sympathetically.

"It was perfectly ghastly," she murmured.

"A very promising young officer, I should think," the Admiral continued, "and a very sad death.

Brings things home to you when you remember that it was only yesterday he was here, poor fellow!"

Geraldine and her mother rose from their places, a few minutes later. The latter looked up at Thomson as he held open the door.

"You won't be long, will you?" she begged.

"You can take him with you, if you like," the Admiral declared, also rising to his feet. "He doesn't drink port and the cigarettes are in your room. I have to take the Chair at a recruiting meeting at Holborn in a quarter of an hour. The car's waiting now. You'll excuse me, won't you, Thomson?"

"Of course," the latter assented. "I must leave early myself. I have to go back to the War Office."

Geraldine took his arm and led him into the little morning-room.

"You see, I am carrying you off in the most barefaced fashion," she began, motioning him to a seat by her side, "but really you are such an elusive person, and only this morning, in the midst of that awful thunder of bombs, when we stood on the roof and looked at London breaking out into flames, I couldn't help thinking — remembering, I mean — how short a time it is since you and I were face to face with the other horror and you saved my life. Do you know, I don't think that I have ever said 'thank you' — not properly?"

"I think the words may go," he answered, smiling. "It was a horrible time while it lasted but it was soon over. The worst part of it was seeing those others, whom we could not help, drifting by."

"I should have been with them but for you," she

said quietly. "Don't think that I don't know it. Don't think that I don't regret sometimes, Hugh, that I didn't trust you a little more completely. You are right about so many things. But, Hugh, will you tell me something?"

"Of course!"

"Why were you so almost obstinately silent when father spoke of poor Captain Granet's death?"

"Because I couldn't agree with what he said," Thomson replied. "I think that Granet's death in exactly that fashion was the best thing that could possibly have happened for him and for all of us."

She shivered as she looked at him.

"Aren't you a little cruel?" she murmured.

"I am not cruel at all," he assured her firmly. "Let me quote the words of a greater man — 'I have no enemies but the enemies of my country, and for them I have no mercy.'"

"You still believe that Captain Granet — "

"There is no longer any doubt as to his complete guilt. As you know yourself, the cipher letter warning certain people in London of the coming raid, passed through his hands. He even came here to warn you. There were other charges against him which could have been proved up to the hilt. While we are upon this subject, Geraldine, let me finish with it absolutely. Only a short time ago I confronted him with his guilt, I gave him ten days during which it was my hope that he would embrace the only honourable course left to him. I took a risk leaving him free, but during the latter part of the time he was watched day and night. If he had lived until

this morning, there isn't any power on earth could have kept him from the Tower, or any judge, however merciful, who could have saved him from being shot."

"It is too awful," she faltered, "and yet — it makes me so ashamed, Hugh, to think that I could not have trusted you more absolutely."

He opened his pocket-book and a little flush of colour came suddenly into her cheeks. He drew out the ring silently.

"Will you trust yourself now and finally, Geraldine?" he asked.

She held out her finger.

"I shall be so proud and so happy to have it again," she whispered. "I do really feel as though I had behaved like a foolish child, and I don't like the feeling at all, because in these days one should be more than ordinarily serious, shouldn't one? Shall I be able to make it up to you, Hugh, do you think?"

He stooped to meet her lips.

"There is an atonement you might make, dear," he ventured. "Do you remember a suggestion of mine at one of those historic luncheons of Lady Anselman's?"

She laughed into his eyes for a moment and then looked away.

"I was wondering whether you had forgotten that," she confessed.

THE END